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THE HIBBERT LECTURES
SECOND SERIES

THE APPROACH TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

Lectures delivered in London and Cambridge, April–May, 1921

BY
JAMES MOFFATT
D.D., D.Litt., Hon.M.A. (Oxon.)

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" If we learn from historical works about the people to whom the apostles write, if we learn not only their situation but their origin, habits, institutions and mode of life, it is wonderful what light—rather let me say, what life—this will put into our reading, which otherwise must be drowsy and dead."

—ERASMUS : *Ratio seu methodus compendio perveniendi ad veram theologiam*, p. 79.

" The characteristic feature of the nineteenth century is the substitution of the historical method for the dogmatic, in all studies relating to the human mind. . . The great advance of criticism has been the substitution of the category of *becoming* for *being*, of the conception of relativity for that of the absolute, of movement for immobility."

—RENAN : *Averroès et l'Averroisme*, pp. vi, vii.

" Christianity now and then becomes conscious of its original negative relation to the ' world ' and to the kingdom of this world, and so, in my opinion, regains some of its pristine essence and strength. A Christianity reconciled and at peace with the world is a weak and powerless affair, surely not the real and original Christianity. True Christianity may always be recognized by the fact that it seems strange and dangerous to the world."

—PAULSEN : *System der Ethik* (Eng. tr.), p. 60.

" It is now unthinkable that any Christian should either reject the New Testament as the norm of his faith, or should try to add to it."

—P. GARDNER : *Evolution in Christian Doctrine*, p. 53.

To
W. M. MACGREGOR
IN ADMIRATION

PREFACE

IN honouring me with an invitation to deliver this course of lectures the Hibbert trustees were good enough to convey a suggestion about my subject and object. My instructions were, not to offer any results of research such as might appeal only to experts, but to lay before the educated public an outline of the present position of the New Testament in the light of modern criticism. What was desired, as I understood it, was not a summary of critical opinion, nor a chronicle of investigations, but some brief statement of the general situation created by historical criticism, a statement which should also bring out the positive value of the New Testament literature for the world of to-day. The idea was an appreciation of the New Testament not merely as a historical phenomenon, but as a source of guidance in social reconstruction, so that some readers might be enabled to recover or retain a sense of its lasting significance for personal faith and social ideals.

This is a new departure for Hibbert Lectures. It is an extremely difficult enterprise, but it is timely. Difficult, because there are obvious temptations to run off into generalities or to present under the guise of conclusions material which is still debated with reason by competent authorities. Timely, because there are factors in the intellectual, religious, and social world

which involve a new estimate of the New Testament, and also because, while it would be unscientific to claim finality in literary or historical criticism for many results or for all methods of research, it is fair to say that advances have been made in various directions which will not need to be retraced. We are learning how to approach this great literature from the proper angle and thus to see it in its true perspective. This approach to the New Testament is the work of the historical method. What I have tried to do in these lectures is to explain and illustrate it, to sketch some of its salient principles, and in general to suggest what the modern mind may expect to find and must be prepared to offer, in approaching the collection of primitive Christian classics which we call the New Testament. Books of technical and popular introduction to the literature or to the period of the New Testament abound. I am not adding to their number. What I have had in view is a different audience, partly those who imagine that with the passing of the doctrine of verbal inspiration the New Testament has ceased to possess any vital importance for the age, partly those who are still unconsciously under the mediæval idea that the New Testament contains a mass of beliefs and truths, assent to which constitutes faith, and partly those who read it and read about it with a mixture of interest and perplexity in their minds. Norden thinks that during the first three centuries pagans only read the New Testament if they wanted to refute it. That ceased to be true in the fourth century, and it is not true to-day. People who are outside the churches are reading the New Testament, not with any desire to ridicule it, but from higher motives of all kinds; they are curious, now and

then repelled, here and there attracted, but generally unable to explain intelligently the reasons of their fascination or of their antipathies. This is where the historical method comes in. It opens up to the mind the reality of the New Testament. It shows us the New Testament exactly as it is, neither less nor more. And by putting it back into its original setting the historical method allows it to make its timeless appeal to the conscience and the imagination.

I notice, in discussing the New Testament with students of both sexes, that their questions generally turn upon two subjects, miracles and money. That is, they are disturbed about the historical tradition and also about the bearing of the New Testament upon the social problem. Both subjects are primarily connected with the gospels. But it is not possible to treat either apart from the general attitude of the mind towards the New Testament as a whole; to state, much more to answer, such questions, it is essential to approach the New Testament along the lines laid down by sound historical criticism, even although this approach may not carry the inquirer all the road to the final solution.

This is the point of view taken in the following lectures. I have tried honestly to be candid; also to be as untechnical as possible. Above all I have desired to give an impetus to the mind of the reader. Some people grudge the study of a New Testament passage the amount of attention they would bestow upon the lie of a golf ball. I would like to stir in them even a pulse of curiosity. But I would like to carry them further still into a throbbing interest. For it is not enough to know a hundred things about the New Testament if one does not care to know

that it contains a spiritual and social message which this preoccupied century had better try to master before it approaches anything else.

JAMES MOFFATT.

GLASGOW,
1921.

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CHAPTER I

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

THE ordinary man who opens this collection of sacred books, which Christians tell him is their "New Testament," discovers one or two facts about it at the outset.

I

(*a*) If he approaches it from any acquaintance with the science of Comparative Religion, or even from any familiarity with similar collections, he recognizes, to begin with, that this is the smallest religious book of any great religion. Palestine has been called the least of all lands; the New Testament is less in bulk than any sacred book in the world. Dr. Frederick Poulsen,[1] the Copenhagen scholar, called attention the other day to the small size of the adyton in Apollo's temple at Delphi; it struck him as wonderfully diminutive, like a small box inside a larger one, the floor space of the interior only amounting to fifteen square metres. "How small is that which in the glamour of poetry and through the religious reverence of thousands acquired a mysterious greatness in the imagina-

[1] *Delphi* (Eng. tr.), p. 151.

tion of men! . . . 'The unapproachable,' whence all Hellas for centuries derived counsel and comfort, no bigger than a ship's cabin!" The New Testament is an approachable book. And, in approaching it, we are struck by its small size. Take, for example, the smallest canon of Buddhism, the Pali canon—that is, the sectarian collection of scriptures which are commonly associated with Ceylon. This canonical collection is said to be about twice as large as the entire English Bible, while the huge northern canon of Buddhism is a library in itself. And even the Pali canon represents centuries of reflection and experience. "It is not simply the teachings of the Buddha and his immediate disciples handed down from generation to generation, but it is the expression of the religious experience of several centuries, guided more or less by the original impress communicated by Gautama."[1] The New Testament literature, on the other hand, is more compact, covering not more than a single century. It is a book which may be slipped into the pocket, and it may be read in a few hours. It is shorter even than the Koran, and devoid of the reiterations and repetitions which swell that sacred book of Islam. Also, it was never supplemented; unlike the Old Testament, the New Testament is the same small book for all the Churches: Roman, Greek, and Re-formed.

(*b*) As compared with the Koran, the New Testament is also better arranged. The reader observes that the first five books seem to deal with the past;

[1] A. K. Reischauer, *Studies in Japanese Buddhism*, p. 162.

they describe the rise of this religious movement in the days of Jesus and its spread for the next thirty years or so, after his death. He then comes upon twenty-one letters, occupied with the present; these vary from notes of a page to documents about the length of a pre-modern sermon. Finally, he discovers that the last book looks to the future, embodying a number of revelations and anticipations of what is coming on and over the earth.

At the same time, if he pushes his inquiries further, he finds that, as in an ordinary edition of Shakespeare, the printed order is not the order in which the books were written, that the book of Revelation, for example, was not written last, and that the gospels were not composed till a number of the epistles were in circulation. He finds that the books were written at different times, and not always by the men whose names they bear. Here discussion begins; a swarm of intricate problems rises, over the literary and historical criticism of the documents. And still further, he discovers that these books were selected and collected by the Christian churches during the second and third centuries, edited for their place in the canon, and carefully arranged. He wishes to know how far this affects their intrinsic authority, and whether the debt we owe to these churches is more than what we owe, say, to Peisistratus or Aristarchus for their rescue of Homer, or to the editors of the first folio of Shakespeare.

This, as we shall see, raises questions of fundamental importance for the appreciation of the New

Testament. But meantime, if the reader takes the New Testament itself and applies his mind to its exact and exacting study, he has the impression (*c*) that this is a healthy book, healthy in its emphasis on truth, on vital energy, and on the realities of life. These qualities are by no means common in the great religious literatures of the ancient world, and even in some expressions of Christianity itself they are often relegated to an inferior position. One of the features, for example, in which the New Testament resembles Greek literature at its best is the instinctive avoidance of anything like sentimentalism. The spirit that plays with words or with emotions for the sake of effect is wholly out of keeping with the pages of the New Testament. As Mr. Livingstone puts it in his book on *The Greek Genius* (p. 108):

> "There are two literatures in the world which are at war with this spirit; they are very different in their conclusions, for they start from widely different presuppositions, but they are very much alike in their determination to see things as they are. One of these is Greek literature, the other is the New Testament. Both to the early Christians and to the Greeks life was too real a thing to be surrendered to sentiment and sham."

Greek literature resisted the temptation to unreality which sprang out of the artistic temperament. The New Testament resisted the religious temptation to unreality, which is more subtle and varied, with its tendency to seek consolation in unreal fancies, or to be affected either in disclaiming or in expressing moral passion. There are three topics, for example, on which we moderns are apt to wax sentimental: pain, nature, and childhood. Note

how Jesus speaks about each of them, without a trace of exaggeration or fancy; he used no fine words to cover them up or to exalt them. And this general attitude is characteristic of the New Testament as a whole. There are no scented phrases or pretty fancies in its pages. The criticism to which the New Testament has been exposed has made it impossible any longer to regard it as a collection of books dictated by God to form a code for men, or as a compendium of infallible truth, or as a mosaic of texts to be fitted into proofs of dogma. But it has also done away with the notion that the New Testament is the book of a timid little conventional society which shrank from contact with the facts of life and sheltered itself behind ingenious deductions about God and the world. It was not written for religious dilettantes, nor by such persons. Its writers were not self-conscious artists, and its audience was not men and women who gathered in pious corners to evade the living issues of a disheartened or disheartening world. There is a buoyancy in the New Testament which is due to its position in the open-air of religion. There is no pathos in it, if we mean by pathos a weak, morbid, evasive attitude to life in general. The pathetic thing about the New Testament is the way in which it has been sometimes perverted into a textbook for reactionaries or for revolutionaries, for people whom the apostles would have found it difficult to realize as alive at all, for the hectic and the conventional. You may doubt some of its historical statements, you may hesitate to agree with some

of its arguments ; but at least it is never tired, and therefore never eccentric nor affected. Like any classic, it is fresh, sound, and of a wide appeal, far beyond its own age. These are not professional praises of the New Testament. A eulogy of the New Testament would be as impertinent as a eulogy of the Sistine Madonna or of Beethoven's sonatas. I am not putting forward any rhetorical claims on behalf of this literature. If they sound exaggerated, it is probably because custom has dulled some of us to the intrinsic power of the New Testament, or because we are not prepared to take as much trouble to understand it as we would with the sonnets of Milton or a play of Shakespeare. But approach this little collection of Greek books with a fresh mind, and it will reveal a freshness of its own, a spirit of moral reality, a direct outlook upon life, and a quickening preoccupation with what are the absorbing issues of God, the soul, and the world.

(*d*) Vitality implies the power of change, and a further impression made by the New Testament is that of creative power ; it records a religious movement which adapts itself to its environment and which can interpret as well as apply itself to fresh conditions. Christianity was a growth of the Semitic religious genius which within a century or less after its birth transplanted itself into the soil of Roman and Greek civilization round the Mediterranean basin. No other development of Semitic faith has achieved the same result. Judaism and Islam remain more or less obstinately

Oriental. But Christianity threw itself upon the larger world and by virtue of some vital power assimilated what was essential to it in the environment of that world. The beginnings of this change are reflected within the New Testament, which contains the classical documents bearing upon the rise and early fortunes of the religion during the first century of its existence. These documents reveal changes and crises of fundamental importance. The primitive disciples did not seek to reproduce slavishly the conditions of life in Galilee, where Jesus had lived; out in the larger world of the Roman empire, they organized themselves afresh, and thought out their faith, often in different ways, and not always unanimously. Alike in their methods and in their conceptions, they were not afraid of developing their religious inheritance.

The teaching of Jesus, for example, was not tied up to phrases. The truths which he generally conveyed by the terms *Father* and *kingdom* were capable of other expressions. Indeed, one of the proofs of the vitality and spontaneity of the New Testament lies in its freedom from any stereotyped adherence to phrases coined by Jesus. For instance, the sudden change from *kingdom* to *covenant* in the words of Jesus at the Last Supper is intelligible enough. *Covenant* was bound up with sacrifice; *kingdom* was not. The deeper idea of the kingdom which Jesus was inculcating, in connexion with his own suffering and death, could be better expressed by the parallel idea of a covenant, which

to the Semitic mind involved ratification by blood. The probability of this is linked to the fact that the associations of covenant must have been familiar to Jesus, whose mind was steeped in the prophecies of the Old Testament. The Servant of the Lord, in one of the deepest sections of that prophecy, was described in terms of the covenant. *I will appoint thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations,* i.e. to be the medium or embodiment of the divine covenant with Israel.[1] A fresh relation of Israel to Yahweh is to be inaugurated by means of the mission and vicarious death of the Servant. Thus the two cardinal ideas of an ancient covenant in Israel's religion, sacrifice and forgiveness, are here linked to the function of the Servant who is to realize and embody such a relationship in his own person. For his sake and through his self-sacrifice the covenant will be established.

A similar flexibility may be traced in the apostolic interpretation. Thus two writers recalled an Old Testament archaic phrase about the kingdom, in order to denote the direct relation of Christians to their God—the phrase about Israel being *a kingdom of priests,* or a royal priesthood. The author of First Peter quotes this in his description of Christians as the new and true Israel of God who, as the community of Jesus the messiah, have succeeded to the privileges and position of the older people: *You are the elect race, the royal priesthood.*[2] It is the one connexion in which he alludes to the kingdom at all. Similarly, and even more explicitly,

[1] Isa. xlii. 6, xlix. 8. [2] 1 Peter ii. 9.

the prophet John [1] hails Jesus as *him who loves us and has loosed us from our sins by shedding his blood —he has made us a realm of priests for his God and Father*. The phrase means direct access; it is an archaic equivalent for the immediate relation between the forgiven soul and God, which the self-sacrifice of Jesus has secured. The primitive idea of a priest was that he belonged to God and had the right of access to the divine presence. In this sense, and in this sense alone, these authors mean that the Christian community is a *realm of priests*; it was the original sense of the promise, and they claim that it has been fulfilled by the work of Jesus, who sets his people in a relation of close intimacy with God. Nothing is farther from their minds than the corollary of priests interceding for others; the essential conception is that of personal nearness to God, the right of access and fellowship which has been won for them at so great a cost by Jesus Christ.

In short, whether it is a question of Paul omitting the phrase *Son of Man*, or of God's fatherly relation to Christians falling into the background, as it does in writings like the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Apocalypse, in these and many other phenomena we detect a real evidence of freedom and flexibility. The change is more in language than in idea, often, though even in the realm of ideas the emphasis alters, fresh expressions are coined, and new aspects are developed.

Look into the New Testament and you see Christianity changing under your eyes, changing because

[1] Rev. i. 5, 6.

it is alive, maintaining its continuity no doubt, but still devoid of any stereotyped expression. The changes are momentous, once our eyes are opened to them, e.g. the transmutation of the messianic hope in the Johannine theology. And thus it is that the study of the New Testament, like the study of history in general, teaches us not to be afraid of change in our religion.[1] What is the lesson forced upon us by the use of the historical imagination? Is it not in many cases a confirmation of faith in human initiative? Our newer methods enable us to watch the saving reaction of life against institutions and formulas which have ceased to be adequate, to mark the variety of forms and expressions assumed by our religion as it adapted itself more or less effectively to an altered environment, the survival of the unfit until an obsolete discipline becomes a present heresy and provokes a reform, the neglect of some vital element avenged in the next generation by a fresh, one-sided emphasis, the constant re-discovery of Jesus in service, speculation, and art, the difference of appeal made by certain features in the Gospel to different temperaments and in different ages, Christianity's power of translating itself at one epoch after another, the instinct which preserves it from surrendering to some plausible contemporary dilution, and the recuperative energy which survives periods when good men despair of the republic

[1] Thus "the procedure of Christ and His Apostles in reference to the Law was more revolutionary than anything that is involved in accepting the lessons of criticism" (Sanday, *Inspiration*, p. 413).

and bad men hope for its continuance from selfish grounds. These impressions begin as we study the New Testament period itself, short though its course is in years. They certainly deliver the honest student from any morbid fear of fresh developments. If Goethe was right in arguing that the best thing we get out of history is the enthusiasm which it generates, the New Testament history—and by that I mean not simply the history of the New Testament at work within the Church throughout the centuries, but the history reflected by the New Testament records—generates vital confidence in a divine Power which is greater than any expression or idea of it at any given epoch. Once we part with the false view of the New Testament as a legal, literal code, we are quickened by its study. Whatever we think of history as a causal science, the genuine knowledge of the past, of the period even in which our religion originated, liberates the mind from a dread of new ventures; it is an aid to those who would get past what is stereotyped and tepid. Once, for example, we realize all that was meant by the extension of the gospel to non-Jews during the first generation, or by the re-interpretation of Christianity in Paulinism and in the Fourth gospel, we find it hard to conceive any demand for alteration in our own day which could not be answered by the same spirit of vital energy. We must remember, though we sometimes forget, that we are not farther from the re-formation of the Church than Augustine and Justinian were from its formation. A nervous plea for the stationary at all costs and

in all departments of the Church to-day has no right to cut wood for its crutches from the forest of Church history, least of all from the historical study of the New Testament. Indeed, the more we familiarize ourselves with the story of the changes, often drastic and daring, through which the faith of the primitive as well as of the later Church had to pass, the less liable we shall be to imagine that in the nineteen-twenties we have reached a land where it ought "always to be afternoon." Confidence in view of fresh departures is a fair inference from what the New Testament discloses about the beginnings of the Christian movement. Certainly it is not the confidence which makes men worship the new because it is new, in a thin, generous emotion, throwing over the past with its lessons of moderation and restraint. The New Testament shows changes, but they are the changes of a movement which preserves its identity, a movement which changes because it lives and moves, because it is and means to be itself. It takes up some ideas and forms, it discards others; it is inclusive and it assimilates; but it holds to certain fundamental truths; it is never a mere synthesis of contemporary elements in its age. The vital distinction between tradition and traditionalism is taught plainly by the New Testament, as plainly as the capacity of Christianity to transform itself. Already the story of the religion in its progress is a warning against false starts and impetuous individualism; we can get from the New Testament a reminder that when men become indifferent to the history of their faith they tend to be thin in conceiving

or promoting its promise, and that the interests of Christianity are not served best by those who endow themselves with the title of "prophetic" and break away from the historical base of their religion. No gain is worth the loss incurred by a wanton disparagement of the classical past. It only means that we have to go back eventually and pick up what vital traditions we have dropped. And one of the tragedies of the Church's history is that as time passes it is increasingly difficult to go back, increasingly difficult to recall what was once parted with so lightly. This is not a reactionary plea against experiment; it is merely a reminder that jaunty, irresponsible, indiscriminate experiments are not countenanced by the study of the New Testament period.

(*e*) Possibly, in comparing organized Christianity with the New Testament, whether in doctrine or in worship or in organization or in ethics, it is the conservative tendency that impresses us. At any rate, this or any other impression is an instant reminder that the possession of the New Testament puts Christianity into a position similar to that of any other great religion with a sacred book. The religion grows and alters; its historical environment generally becomes very different; fresh problems of thought and practice are forced upon it; and the result is an effort to prove that any subsequent changes are merely the development of what was implicit in the sacred classic. Jews held that the words of the Torah are "fruitful and multiply"; the Mosaic revelation may be drawn out into an

elaborate and novel code, but it still remains the authority. So with the Traditions in Islam, which similarly treat the Koran. Christianity, especially in its mediæval form, followed a similar course by its development of tradition as the prerogative of the living Church, and still it is a central problem to define the exact relation of Christianity to its sacred book, the Bible, in particular to the New Testament. The relation is not exactly analogous to that in Judaism or in Islam, though several features, e.g. the ingenuity of the interpreters, the development of verbal inspiration, and the variety of freer tendencies, recur in all. Now, in approaching the New Testament, we naturally expect the historical method to do something in the direction of clearing up this problem.

It lays bare at least the elements of a serious and delicate problem by indicating that the New Testament reflects more than primitive Christianity; there are signs, in its varied expressions, of distinct tendencies, doctrinal, ethical, and ecclesiastical, towards a Christianity which is not primitive. Thus Matthew's insertion of *if thou wilt be perfect* (xix. 21), i.e. of the highest grade, is a modification of the original which suggests the mediæval theory of a double morality, of a distinction between counsels of perfection and precepts for the ordinary Christian. Similarly it is a question whether his balancing of *the Son of Man* and *the Son of God* (e.g. in xvi. 16) does not contain the germ of the later theological distinction between two natures in one person.[1] Again, the Quaker may argue with equal logic from the deliberate substitution of a brotherly gathering for the Eucharist in the Fourth gospel, as others may point out the rise of a quasi-sacramental significance attached to ordination in the Pastoral Epistles, as if the apostles transmitted something special and indispensable to their immediate successors. These

[1] See Denney, *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 65.

are simply casual instances of what the New Testament discloses to historical criticism. Christianity is taking shape. Is that shape necessarily final, in any one, in the earliest or the latest, of its expressions? Ultimately it is a problem of what is meant by revelation, then of the relation between spirit and form in religious development; the historical method begins by removing the layer of appearances and attempting to present the data for a decision.

II

Further, we are impressed by the things in this book which are argued from rather than argued for. It is generally important to note what a new religion takes for granted. What it attacks is characteristic; so is what it urges. But what it is able to assume, without much or any argument, is not less significant. In the case of primitive Christianity, the fact that it started from the religion of Judaism enabled it to carry on several elements of faith as axiomatic, stamping them afresh; others it introduces with even more originality.

(*a*) There is the existence of God. Jesus and the early Christians never met an atheist; it could be assumed that all people believed in a God or gods of some kind, and consequently the New Testament presupposes the faith that God exists. The new message relates to His character; but His being is taken for granted, and was only natural in view of Jewish piety. One writer indeed reminds Christians who had been born pagans that once upon a time they were *devoid of hope and God within the world*,[1] literally "atheists" (ἄθεοι). But this means no more than that they were without the true God

[1] Eph. ii. 12.

of Israel. No apostle has to argue, as Jeremiah once did, with contemporaries who carried scepticism to the point of atheism; none refutes atheism as Philo had just done in his treatise on Dreams. Doubtless there were practical atheists, people whose lives denied their belief in God. But the New Testament is absorbed in revealing the spirit and aims of God as the Father of the Lord Jesus, and nothing gave any occasion to refute a denial of God's existence.

(*b*) There is the revelation of God. It is assumed that He speaks and seeks. This divine initiative is expressed fully in the conception of His love: *He first loved us—God proves his love for us by this, that Christ died for us when we were still sinners.* The deep longing of the soul is to be right with God or at one with God. This yearning at the heart of the religious man denotes a need which the New Testament accentuates and satisfies, by revealing a God whose desire for man is prior to any desire of man for Himself, a God of love whose aim is to fulfil the craving for fellowship and bliss. What is new in the New Testament is the re-statement of this truth. But the re-statement carries on the inherited intuitions of Jewish piety that revelation is made by God to His people, and that faith is not man groping or guessing, but answering to a prior manifestation of God Himself.

(*c*) The God of redemption is the God of creation. The revelation is of God's purpose to redeem man from sin and death, and this is connected with His position as the creator and ruler of the universe.

The aim disclosed in the revelation is not worked out in an alien setting, but in a natural order over which God reigns. Again, an inheritance from Jewish faith, which held to the supreme religious value of a belief about creation. Jesus praises his God as *Father, Lord of heaven and earth,*[1] and a later writer declares that *in bringing many sons to glory it was befitting that He for whom and by whom the universe exists should perfect the Pioneer of their salvation by suffering.*[2] The implication is that the fatherly purpose of God has behind it the full powers of the universe, and that there is no incongruity between His spiritual being and the material order. The day was soon to dawn when this faith was challenged; the Church had to maintain it against gnostics who, vexed by the problem of evil, attempted to find a solution of their difficulties in severing the redeeming God from the Creator. As yet, however, during the New Testament period, the Church could assume that there was no antithesis between the two; which explains how natural Paul found it to work out speculations on the relation of Christ to creation.

(*d*) The message and mission of Jesus involved a religion which could not be racial. It is needless to elaborate this point. Theoretically it is granted, although Christianity has often found the task of applying the truth both hard and distasteful. The racial prejudice which at first tended to confine Christianity to people of Jewish birth, or to those who would agree to live under Jewish rules, has

[1] Matt. xi. 25. [2] Heb. ii. 10.

repeatedly emerged, and is always with us, in the shape of caste-prejudice and nationalism. The solvent is the spirit of the New Testament. The more we realize that Jesus lived among the Jews, sharing their worship and appealing primarily to them, the more we are conscious of a stress upon faith as a human act which ignored the ancient barriers of race and nationality.

The movement originated with him, though it was not without some tentative precedents in Judaism, and it was completed, in its first crucial stage, by the next generation of the Church, notably through the influence of Paul, who in this and other respects understood Jesus so well. The stress upon inwardness, the indifference to privileges of birth and blood, and the frank criticism of the ceremonial law—these and other features in his character and teaching meant a religious faith which could make no terms with any pride of Jewish descent, and which was certain to break through any trammels of racial exclusiveness. It was not a religion in which any class or race or nation could claim any prerogative.

(*e*) The teaching of Jesus—I mean, the mere fact that Jesus teaches at all. There is a surprise in this. Jesus believed himself to be messiah, and in his messianic vocation he set himself to instruct his age. We sometimes forget what a novelty that was. It is a commonplace of thought that Jesus was conscious of a vocation which, by its element of suffering, ran counter to contemporary conceptions of what a messiah was

to be and do. It is by no means a commonplace that teaching was the last thing to be expected of any one claiming to be a messiah in the Judaism of the first century. No one had ever dreamt of such a function in connexion with the messiah. Mark[1] opens his *Gospel of Jesus Christ* by telling us how Jesus, entering Capharnahum on the sabbath day, *at once began to teach in the synagogue*, and how the audience were *astounded at his teaching, for he taught them like an authority, not like the scribes*, who scrupulously appealed to the authority of previous rabbis. The teaching of the scribes as a rule was a careful series of biblical deductions, often suggestive, sometimes clever, but almost invariably based upon the traditional exegesis. What amazed people in the teaching of Jesus was not that he spoke with an accent of independence, which echoed no school, but that he spoke with the vigour and direct intuition of a prophet, as one inspired by God. The impression he made was one of originality. He did not cite earlier cases, nor did he speak in inverted commas. He might base his teaching upon some lesson from the Old Testament, but his words had no anxious reference to rabbinic precedent or tradition (see below, p. 80). Here, men felt instinctively, was a new power. And yet historical research reveals a still more surprising feature, in the fact that he taught at all. Looking back upon the period with its current beliefs and expectations about a messiah, we find this fact as remarkable as anything. Pious Jews had never anticipated

[1] Mark i. 21, 22.

such a rôle for their messiah. Some expected that he would be *taught by God*, but this meant no more than that such a royal scion of the Davidic dynasty would be inspired for the task of administration, equipped with wisdom to rule and rally the saints of Israel, mentally and morally competent to carry out the divine purpose of establishing the theocracy on earth. Such is the idea reflected in "The Psalms of Solomon," eighteen hymns of the Pharisaic faith from the first century B.C. Another messianic manifesto, from the same source and period, tallies with this view, I mean, the so-called Parables embodied in the "Book of Enoch" (xxxvii.–lxxi.). Here the messiah or Son of Man is richly endowed with wisdom, but this bears upon his personal character and on his functions as a divine administrator. It is by this "wisdom" that he is enabled, for example, to champion the saints against their foes. But there is not the slightest expectation of teaching; at most, he is expected to uphold the Torah. He does not impart insight and penetration; he employs them in a judicial capacity. Consequently, the fact that Jesus the messiah taught as He did is a new thing, and yet a thing taken for granted somehow by the New Testament historians.

(*f*) Finally it is assumed that sacrifice is normal: *without shedding of blood there is no remission*.[1] It is true that this is moralized. The New Testament shows the Church breaking with the sacrificial ritual of Judaism and moving, again with a certain

[1] Heb. ix. 22.

precedent in some quarters of Old Testament religion, towards a spiritual religion which was independent of priests and sacrifices as a medium for forgiveness and fellowship. Also, the conception of sacrifice as self-sacrifice is applied not simply to Christians, but to Jesus Christ, whose death is interpreted in terms of sacrifice, and approached from the conviction that on the ancient legal principle of the Old Testament the death of a victim must precede the pardon of transgressions. To moderns this may seem inconclusive. The sacrificial system is remote and distasteful to Westerns. We are puzzled by it. We investigate the origin and meaning of sacrifice in primitive religion, but the New Testament silently assumes the validity of the sacrificial principle for the interpretation of Christ's death. The atoning efficacy of blood shed in sacrifice is axiomatic for the various descriptions of Christ's death. No rationale of sacrifice is offered. The divine principle of it is taken for granted. In other words, no question is asked, even by Paul or by the writer of Hebrews, about what stirs questioning in our mind. Such New Testament writers are preoccupied with the tragic and fundamental fact of sin, a fact which to them is only met by the love of God in the death of Jesus Christ as a sacrifice. Their common position is that this self-sacrifice of Christ was a reality in a sense in which older sacrifices were not, and that its efficacy was due to the personality of Christ. But their symbolism implies what was for them and their contemporaries an accepted truth, viz. that for-

giveness of sins by God involved a sacrifice of some kind.

This particular axiom suggests that the main function of historical criticism is to elucidate what was present to the minds of the New Testament writers on such a point, in order that the significance of the religious estimate may be appreciated. Before we can determine what it must mean for us, we require to ascertain what it meant for the New Testament writers themselves, recognizing that it implies the profound conviction that sin is not a matter of chance in this world, and that redemption is therefore organically related to the moral order.

As it happens, this axiom raises a question which is bound up with our title of the New Testament, for "testament" means covenant, and fellowship on the basis of a divine covenant has forgiveness as its indispensable preliminary. Turgenev, in *Fathers and Children*, tells of a Russian princess who had the reputation of being simply a grand lady in society, and yet was torn with inward struggles of conscience: "at night she wept and prayed, found no peace in anything, and often paced her room till morning, wringing her hands in anguish, or sat, pale and chill, over a psalter." Her lover, an army captain, could not fathom the secret of her enigmatic personality; sometimes she seemed to yield to him, and at other times a mysterious force appeared to withdraw her into a remote and distant sphere of thought and feeling. Finally, bewildered by her behaviour, to which he could find no clue, he gave her a ring with a sphinx engraved on the stone. He

could not guess the meaning of her changeful attitude to him; neither could she. Some inward power swayed her and held her back from becoming a mere woman of the world. Years afterward, she died abroad, leaving instructions that the ring should be returned to him. When he opened the packet, he found that the princess "had drawn lines in the shape of a cross over the sphinx, and sent him word that the solution of the enigma—was the cross." When we approach the New Testament, what we see is the conviction that the clue to the enigma of human life in this inscrutable world lies in a revelation of God which was expressed in the cross of Jesus Christ, a revelation of divine love in its full power at the cost of suffering and sacrifice. Now fellowship with God upon such a basis of reconciliation is the idea which underlies the word "Testament." We turn therefore to the reasons which led the early Church to enshrine this cardinal idea in the editorial name of their sacred literature.

CHAPTER II

THE ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE NAME

THE approach to the New Testament along the lines of historical criticism carries one back to a period when there was no New Testament at all, when there was not even the idea of a New Testament. During the first century after the death of Jesus, no one in the Christian Church dreamed of any sacred collection which could be ranked alongside of the Old Testament. To understand the original meaning of the New Testament writings one must divest one's mind of the notion that they belong to a canon or sacred collection. Indeed the process of compiling the collection has in all probability affected the form and even to some slight extent the contents of the text of the original books; they have been edited for their place in the collection, although the amount of editing has not in all likelihood altered them materially. Still, they are not to be isolated, or at any rate read as if they had been from the first sacrosanct. Neither for historical nor for literary purposes is it feasible to draw any arbitrary line marking all the books eventually included in the New Testament from those which were excluded. The former probably

amount to all that was most ancient and important; it is not easy to see that much would have been gained by a different choice, though comparatively little would have been lost if the two notes of John the Presbyter, the Epistle of Judas, and the pseudonymous homily called "Second Peter" had been left out. But the point is, that in studying the New Testament books we require to dismiss from our minds the a priori idea of their canonical authority; the call is to read them as literature thrown up by various phases of the primitive Christian movement, and not as documents intended to supplement one another or to form a symmetrical statement of truth. Their present unity is the editorial work of the later Church.

It is true that as they are studied they disclose a certain unity of their own. We find that they are held together by a fundamental spirit, and that this inner unity is inherent rather than fortuitous. Still, this impression is only made by an independent, free study of their contents, and by approaching them one by one or in groups as they were produced in definite, historical situations, long before there was any idea of putting them together in a sacred collection.

It is superfluous to recount the data and theories about the historical origin of the new Testament writings. These may be found in any critical textbook of introduction. For our present purpose it is sufficient to note that the revelation of God's purpose in Jesus was meant for a people or community, that after his crucifixion and resurrection

the disciples formed themselves into a fellowship which soon spread beyond the confines of Palestine, and that the literature subsequently arose in connexion with this church-life. The New Testament is unintelligible apart from the primitive Church. The clue to its nature and its name, its contents and its composition, lies in the heightened experience of religious hope and faith which was generated by the Spirit of God within the groups of primitive disciples. Something was dropped into the great pool of the world which sent ripples swaying far and wide; a great emotion shook the air, and some of its immediate effects have been chronicled by contemporaries.

It was these phenomena of the Spirit, recorded in the pages of the New Testament itself, these experiences in which the community and its individual members participated, which proved that the messianic age had indeed been inaugurated by Jesus. The wave of exalted faith and hope and love

> "which set so deep and strong
> From Christ's then open grave"

swept the early Christians into the conviction that God had fulfilled His ancient promise to His people, and that they were really living in the last, pregnant days that ushered in the divine climax of revelation. The Spirit was in the Church, the divine Spirit of Jesus Christ, pulsing through the life of its members. It was not accidental that a century later the early creed set side by side these two articles of faith: *I believe in the holy Spirit, in the holy catholic Church.*

The Spirit controlled and inspired these communities. This is fundamental. And one of the main organs of the Spirit is the presence of apostles and prophets, whose words carry with them an authority which Christians whose lives are under the same Spirit are expected to recognize. Practically all we know about the relations between an apostle and his churches is in connexion with Paul, and most of his emphatic statements were elicited by the refractory element in the Corinthian churches, which led him to assert or explain his authority and maintain that his regulations had a divine sanction and force. *If any one considers himself a prophet or gifted with the Spirit, let him understand that what I write to you is a command of the Lord.*[1] So Paul insists against the individualists who exaggerate the independence of the spiritual life. We may assume that this represents the normal claims of an apostle. And the same is true of the prophets. One of them asserts emphatically that the prophet's message is inspired by the Lord Jesus. *The testimony borne by Jesus is the breath of all prophecy.*[2] Once this generation had passed, and their words were preserved in writing, the same authority attached to the record. It was owing to this consciousness of inspiration that the apostolic epistles came to be reckoned as authoritative documents and embodied in the New Testament canon, alongside of the gospels which transmitted the sayings of the Lord. The atmosphere in which this was done is indicated by the remark of Clement

[1] 1 Cor. xiv. 37. [2] Rev. xix. 10.

of Rome, before the end of the first century, that Paul had written First Corinthians by a genuine inspiration of the Spirit (ἐπ' ἀληθείας πνευματικῶς ἐπέστειλεν ὑμῖν).[1]

But when the primitive apostles had died out, and the Church was left with the apostolic writings, the need of some authoritative standard of interpretation became more and more felt. Oral tradition was precarious, and, if we may judge from the extant specimens in Papias, of inferior quality. To appeal to some esoteric apostolic tradition preserved in the Church was idle, since the gnostics made the same claim for themselves, holding that they possessed the fuller apostolic teaching which had not been put into the epistles. To prevent unauthorized teachers drawing erroneous inferences from the Bible and developing vagaries of speculation and practice from a manipulation of texts, the Church had recourse to what afterwards became the Apostles' Creed, i.e. a brief statement of the Christian truth implied in the New Testament. The formula, originally meant for catechumens at baptism, gave what the Church took to be the real, central sense of the sacred writings; it stated lucidly and regularly the meaning of the religion which was embodied in them.

How this worked out, may be seen in the pages of Irenaeus, the great bishop and teacher of the second century. Irenaeus represents the central catholic position better than any of his contemporaries. He calls God the teacher and man the

[1] Clem. Rom. xlvii. 3.

pupil; the books of education are the Scriptures, which belong to the school, and the Christian Church is the school, the accredited custodian of the Bible. He bids Christians read the Bible with the presbyters of the Church, in order to gain the right interpretation of the divine message, in a day when new-fangled notions were being drawn from the pages of the Scriptures by eccentric sects. The Church to interpret the Bible—such was his formula. For the Church had the true apostolic unwritten tradition which alone could view the Bible in its true proportions, and which was conveniently expressed in the creed for one thing. Historically, this was inevitable and serviceable. But it by no means guaranteed any accurate knowledge of the New Testament, such as we demand to-day. Irenaeus's explanations of the New Testament texts are often hopelessly astray. For example, he misinterprets the parable of the mustard-seed; he regards mustard-seed as typifying, by its red and pungent character, the judicial authority of Jesus Christ, as Judge of all the world. Again, his antipathy to gnostic Christians made him twist 2 Corinthians iv. 4. Paul said bluntly of those who refused to accept the gospel that in their case *the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers*: that is, the fault of their unbelief is not the gospel's nor the apostles', but the devil's. The gnostics appealed to this text to prove that the redeeming God was not the god of this world—a view which Irenaeus tried to counter by suggesting that Paul really meant to say "God has blinded the minds of the unbe-

lieving of this world" ; punctuate the text rightly, he said, and you will have no difficulty about it. The punctuation is wrong, of course; Irenaeus let his dogmatic aim deflect his exegesis. Plainly, the possession of apostolic tradition did not make Irenaeus infallible as an exponent of the New Testament: nor indeed—as we must admit—does he claim this function for the Christian Church. The real point to be noticed is that the endeavour of the Church to claim the monopoly of the authentic interpretation of the New Testament throws light upon what was believed to be the credentials of any writing in the New Testament itself.

For it was not enough that early Christian writings should be read aloud at public worship. This practice was not confined to the books which eventually became canonical; several of these books were not read, or not read universally, in the Church of the second century, while others, like the epistle of Clemens Romanus, the Shepherd of Hermas, were. The mere fact of being read aloud in the worship of the Church did not constitute a valid title to be ranked as an inspired scripture, like the Old Testament. A book, to gain entrance to the sacred collection, must be written or inspired by an apostle of the Lord Jesus.

The truth is, the conviction that the apostles possessed full powers from the Lord operated upon the formation of the New Testament as it did upon the parallel development of the early ministry. It was assumed that they were directly and completely inspired. The inference that ministers must

derive their spiritual authority from them, that the primitive officials as well as the primitive Christians owed their possession of the Spirit to the laying on of hands by the accredited apostles, was first drawn. We see it emerging in the later books of the New Testament. Then came, later in the second century, the further inference that the original documents which were to compose the Christian Scriptures must be selected upon the principle that every document which claimed admission to the sacred canon must be inspired or composed by an apostle. Later documents might have their use, but their inspiration was partial and derivative.

Hence the names for the sacred collection of Christian Scriptures. By the beginning of the third century we even hear the term *gospel* being applied to the New Testament as a whole, and it is possible that this usage goes back to Theophilus, the bishop of Antioch in the second century.[1] Apparently *gospels* or *gospel* was used in some quarters for the New Testament, just as *prophets* was the colloquial term for the Old Testament. The Jews had a threefold division for the Old Testament, into the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. This was familiar to the early Church, but it never became normal; the tendency rather was to emphasize the unity of the Old Testament scriptures, and, as the Christian stress fell on the prophets, either *the Law* or *the Law and the Prophets*, or simply *the Prophets*, became a short inclusive term for the Old Testament as a whole. Similarly with the New Testament itself.

[1] Zahn, *Geschichte d. N.Tlichen Kanons*, i. pp. 98 f.

Before that title arose, either *the gospels* or *the apostles* was employed as an adequate term for the Christian scriptures. The four gospels could be included under *the apostles*, for they were due to apostolic inspiration and authorship; one of the first names for them is Justin's "Memoirs drawn up by Apostles." And the apostolic epistles could be grouped under the term *gospel*, as they too contained the word of God and were inspired by the Spirit of Jesus who had commissioned the apostles for their functions.

The gospels, enshrining the story and sayings of the Lord Jesus, were naturally placed first in the collection.

They represented the apostolic tradition of what Jesus said and did, and their survival and selection was a second-century fact. It was in the East that the first impetus was given to the monarchical episcopate under Ignatius. During the first quarter of the second century this ecclesiastical movement developed in the churches of Asia Minor, as it did not elsewhere; local exigencies forced it on, this new organization which was of so much temporary value. Similarly and simultaneously it was in Asia Minor that the selection of four gospels was made. The circumstances are quite obscure, however. Possibly the Ephesian church, with its proud possession of the Fourth gospel, a local product, compromised with the other churches in admitting the other three ,under the common title of "The Gospel"—the sub-titles, "according to Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John," indicating the apostolic

writers whose representations of the one Gospel were there preserved. Evidently the quartette of gospels was not at once recognized in all quarters. For example, we find that there were Churches in the second century which read only one gospel, or perhaps two, and these not always any of the gospels which afterwards became canonical. Marcion's churches were content with one gospel, an edition of Luke. There were even churches of a more central type, like the Syrian church, which for a time preferred a harmony like the Diatessaron to the four canonical gospels. But the fittest survived in the struggle for existence, and to this slow conflict we owe our present four gospels in the collection.

As for the apostolic epistles, their inclusion was as natural and gradual. One word only requires to be said about the epistles of Paul.

The New Testament is more than a reflection of the alterations within Christianity during the primitive period; some of its writings contributed definitely to the process of alteration. In the later books, for example, we are conscious that the burning problem of the relation between Christianity and the Jewish Law no longer exists. A crisis has passed; an issue has been raised and met. The successful emergence of Christianity from this struggle with the narrowing conservative tendencies which threatened at one time to reduce it to a higher variety of Judaism, was largely due to the influence and teaching of the apostle Paul. He completed the liberating work begun by Stephen. One of his rich services was that he forced the early Church

to realize the inner principle of freedom which was implicit in the gospel of Jesus, and inconsistent with any racial prerogative. The epistles to the Galatians and to the Romans reflect the height and heat of the struggle. But these epistles were themselves strokes in the battle. As indeed they have proved in later ages.

Apart from this, we need only note that the inclusion of the Pauline epistles in the Christian collection was due to the fact that for the second century Paul was pre-eminently "the apostle." He had not been one of the original twelve. But he had won a place second to none of them. It was to Paul that the great Church, now predominantly recruited from non-Jews, looked back as its hero and leader. The deep meaning of his theology was rarely grasped. Nothing is more remarkable than the failure to appreciate the distinctive genius of his message, even by men who honoured him. But his authority was acknowledged. No apostle had written at such length or to such purpose. Not only in Asia Minor, but in the churches of Egypt and of Gaul itself, Paul is "the apostle." The title is his, not Peter's, not John's. Spurts of disparagement occasionally broke out,[1] but not even the polemical use made of him by Marcion could affect his prestige in the catholic churches. It was his epistles that were most often read aloud in Church worship. When the small company of a dozen Christian martyrs were arraigned before the authorities at Scili in Numidia and asked what

[1] E.g. in the Clementine literature of the third century.

books they possessed in their church-chest, they answered, "Books (i.e. either the Old Testament or the gospels, or both) and epistles of Paul, a just man." That was in A.D. 180 and before then the authority of the Pauline epistles had been recognized.

The admission of a book like the Acts of the Apostles depended partly on the fact that it was a direct sequel to Luke's gospel, partly on the fact that it served to explain the epistles of the apostles. There was history in the Old Testament. Why should there not be history in the New Testament? Besides (i) Acts tallied with the interests of the second century in emphasizing the apostolic continuity of the mission and spirit of Jesus, and (ii) established the extension of the original gospel beyond the bounds of Judaism and Palestine, as a catholic movement. The two ideas were indeed blended by Luke. He showed how the mission to non-Jews received recognition by the twelve at Jerusalem, and his representation with its irenical tone prevented so much offence being taken at the brusque statements of Paul in Galatians. The Pauline mission to non-Jews was legitimized, as it were, and apostolic unity conserved.

Eventually the apocalypse of John won its place in the collection. For a time it was suspected in some circles, discredited by the use made of its references to the millennium. And it had rivals which for a time were as popular, if not more popular—the apocalypse of Peter and the *Shepherd* of Hermas. But the weight of the Johannine apocalypse, backed

by its supposed authorship by an apostle, finally overbore opposition.

And so the canon was completed. By "canon" is meant a sacred, authoritative collection of apostolic writings. The idea was older than the Church; the Jewish community had already fixed its canon of the Old Testament, and, following this precedent of the rabbinical schools, the early Church, face to face with the rise and danger of gnosticism, crystallized the New Testament canon, which, like the creed and the ministry, was based upon what was supposed to be apostolic tradition. But the term was novel, at least in a literary sense. "Canon" (*κανών*) was the Greek term for a reed or level, a straight, stiff rule for determining the lie of a stone or plank. Its original associations were thus those of a standard. Metaphorically, it denoted a fixed principle. Already we find Paul using it in this sense when he speaks to the Christians of Galatia about *those who will be guided by this rule* (*ὅσοι τῷ κανόνι τούτῳ στοιχήσουσι*).[1] "Canon" is still an unwritten principle here, though a principle for action. Then it came to be applied to (*a*) the formulated creed (*ὁ κανὼν τῆς ἀληθείας*, regula veritatis sive fidei), especially to the baptismal creed, by which the Christian's faith and morals were to be regulated; also (*b*) to the list[2] of passages from the gospels which were to be read as parallels—e.g. Eusebius's *Canons*; and finally (*c*) to the naming

[1] Gal. vi. 16.

[2] Since the "level" was marked by a scale, numerically arranged.

of saints in the later Roman Mass, since to be mentioned on this list, as one to be prayed for, was to be "canonized," i.e. recognized as belonging to the fixed order of the departed faithful. As "canon" had already come to mean, e.g. in Egypt, the fixed quantity of corn which any given province or property had to yield by way of tax, the change of meaning, from what measures to what is measured, which is involved in the application of the word to the New Testament, was easy. The New Testament "canon" therefore denoted, in the vocabulary of the Church, the authorized books of the apostolic age, which were to be employed in worship, as "the only rule of faith and morals." Its growth naturally implied three things: (i) an authority, (ii) a principle of selection followed by that authority, and (iii) a field within which the selection was exercised. The criterion we have already mentioned. The authority was the Church; but for a long while the decisions varied, sometimes an individual bishop taking action, sometimes a prominent theologian, sometimes the churches of a province, and, finally, in the fourth century, councils acting more or less formally in the name of the Church at large. These councils served often to stereotype some more or less definite agreement which had been already reached. But during the second and third centuries especially there were differences of opinion about books to be included. Thus some, like Hebrews and the Apocalypse, had a long struggle before they won their position. Others were canonized for a time in certain churches, but were ultimately

dropped; thus the *Teaching of the Apostles* was scripture to theologians of Alexandria like Clement and Origen, and remained canonical in the Egyptian church during the third century, like the Epistle of Barnabas, while the *Shepherd* of Hermas was canonical for not only Clement but also Irenaeus and Tertullian. It was from religious literature like this, of an edifying character, that the ecclesiastical canon was finally selected. The term "canon" is late; it does not seem to be earlier than the councils of the fourth century, in this connexion. Previous to that, another and a more significant name had been struck out, the equivalent for our modern "New Testament."

By the last quarter of the second century the term "New Testament" is beginning to appear as a title for the collection of standard Christian scriptures. It emerges in Asia Minor, and it is as likely to be there as anywhere else that the final conception and classification originated, in Asia Minor where the churches were exposed to the full brunt of gnostic and Montanist ideas, which involved a consolidation of creed, ministry, and scriptures upon an apostolic basis. The definite reduction of the New Testament canon to the twenty-seven books of our modern collection was, however, due to the scholarship of another church, the church of Alexandria. There, during the third century, the present collection was arranged. But the materials for it and the very idea of it which we have been surveying belonged to the second century, and pre-eminently to the active Church-life of Asia

Minor with its controversies and cross-currents.

Why "Testament"? and why "New Testament"? The latter question is easily answered. It was "new" as opposed to the "old." But the former question is more difficult. No doubt the term "testament" had been used in a literary sense, to describe the final words of a distinguished man which were invested with a certain authority for posterity. We find this in the older Greek literature and especially in Hellenistic Judaism. "The Testament of Abraham," for example, or "of Solomon" or "of Job," or "The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs" often prove to be transcripts of dying injunctions, left as a legacy of advice and warning to subsequent ages. They contain visions of the future, instructions and regulations. To describe these as "A Testament" was a recognized literary device. But it was not in this sense that the early Christians called the Jewish scriptures "Old Testament," nor their own sacred writings a "New Testament." The New Testament is not the dying counsel of Jesus; it contains much more than the *ipsissima verba* of the historical Jesus or of the Lord speaking in the Spirit to prophetic souls in the primitive community. We have to look in another direction to discover why "Testament" was employed to denote the classical records of Christianity.

Let us start from the usage in our own language and literature. "Bible" was often used as a description of the Old Testament. For instance, in *The Age of Reason*, after a curt discussion of the Old

Testament books, Paine writes: "Thus much for the Bible; I now go on to the book called the New Testament." And "Testament" was reserved in popular language for the New Testament. Scott makes old Edie Ochiltree tell Lovel, in *The Antiquary* (Ch. xxi.):

> "Sinfu' men are we a'; but if ye wad believe an auld grey sinner that has seen the evil o' his ways, there is as much promise atween the twa boards o' the Testament as wad save the warst o' us, could we but think sae."

These instances will suffice. I quote Paine's words, because he at once proceeds sarcastically to comment upon the term "New Testament." "The *New* Testament! That is, the *new* will, as if there could be two wills of the Creator."

The English word "testament" reproduces the Latin equivalent "testamentum," which in turn reproduced a Greek term *diathêkê*, (διαθήκη). But *diathêkê* had a wider range of meaning for the early Christians, which we must analyse.

This is more than a mere question about names or words, remember. The title of a book is often more significant than casual readers recognise. Its conventional sense is not always what it implies, and the student is generally repaid by examining closely words which by dint of repetition have become famous and familiar, and perhaps on that very account misleading. The student of philosophy knows the importance of determining the different meanings of *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* before he plunges into Kant's treatise, for Kant employs *Vernunft* in more senses than one, and the

whole phrase requires careful analysis, if the contents of the book are to be seen in their true focus. Similarly with the phrase or title, *The New Testament*. It is not etymological interest nor antiquarian curiosity which prompts us to ask what it means. The phrase is editorial; it reflects a conception in the mind of the early Church which was responsible for selecting and arranging these little books. But this conception was not arbitrary; it was derived from a religious belief which determined the earlier age in which and for which the books themselves were composed.

"Things" may be, as Hooker said, "always ancienter than their names." But the name often throws light back upon the nature of the thing, and this is so with the New Testament. Although the writings of which it consists were in existence long before they received this collective title, it answers to a vital element in their religious message; indeed it expresses the very centre and core of their significance. The *diathêkê* was the term used by the early Christians to reproduce the Semitic word for covenant, i.e. *berith*, which, in its religious sense, involved not a compact between God and His people so much as a gracious resolve and promise of God, and a historical expression of His purpose to be their God. The Sinai-covenant is God binding Himself generously to His people by a specific pledge at an epoch of their national history. These two elements are fundamental: the voluntary, gracious choice upon the part of God, and the historical expression of that choice. The later

development exhibits at once a deepening and a narrowing of the conception. On the one hand, it is bound up with a particularistic nationalism. The covenant is Israel's privilege over against paganism, a source of patriotic strength and pride; the Jew, as Jew, is entitled to its advantages and benefits. On the other hand, the idea is moralized, as by Jeremiah, who regarded the Sinaitic covenant as hopeless; the people's persistent disregard of its conditions required a new basis for their relation to Yahweh, which he finds in what we may call the regenerate personality of the individual members of the community. God will forgive and forget their sins; and on the basis of this amnesty He will develop a heart-religion of insight and spontaneous obedience, which is no longer the imperfect response of a nation to a code. In the dark, dangerous days of the seventh century, Jeremiah quietly looked forward to something better than any new law or outward re-organization of religion, to something better than even any reform produced by suffering and exile. He longed for an immediate, real relation between God and man. He was convinced that this regeneration of the human soul would come about. How, he does not say. It is enough for him to be sure that God will change men by His creative force, revealing Himself to them inwardly and effectively. He hears the divine promise: *I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.* Such is his high anticipation. True, it is not put forward in any messianic setting.

But in the so-called Zadokite document of Jewish piety, just before the days of Jesus, the idea of a new covenant, a covenant of repentance, began to be linked to the expectation of a messiah. It is in this connexion, only in a richer form, that it blossoms within the New Testament.

Once only it occurs in the sayings of Jesus. But the setting of it is significant (see above, p. 23). When Jesus at the last supper handed the cup of wine to his disciples, he said: *This means my covenant-blood which is shed for many.*[1] Here "many" is not opposed to "all" or even to "few"; the thought is simply of the difference between the one who died and those who are benefited by his death. His blood is shed for more than one, for the community at large. The context of the passage makes it difficult to evade the conclusion that Jesus had here in mind the Servant of the Lord prophecy in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, which predicted the violent death of the Servant as a vicarious atonement *for many*. But this was not the only thought present to his mind. Whether the last supper was intended to be a paschal feast or not—in all likelihood it was not—the associations of the period made an allusion to the older paschal ritual inevitable, and for once Jesus interpreted his coming death in terms of the passover-sacrifice, or the covenant at mount Sinai. As the one had inaugurated an order or covenant of life between God and His people in far-off days, so his own death was to establish a covenant for the new Israel. Only, his self-sacrifice

[1] Mark xiv. 24.

denoted a relationship between God and men which was bound up with their tie to himself. The covenant idea is, therefore, linked to the messianic function of Jesus, i.e. to the fundamental significance of his person for the realization of the divine purpose and promise.

The Greek term, therefore, was used by the evangelists as an equivalent for the Hebrew term "berith," the religious idea being that God made a gracious "disposition" which, as the outcome of His mind and will, was authoritative and final. The disposition meant an arrangement with men, an order of promise and purpose which it was open to men to accept. But its validity did not depend on their acceptance or non-acceptance; it was more than a mere contract or mutual arrangement which would break down, if man failed to fulfil his obligations. There are linguistic difficulties about the precise shades of meaning attached at various periods to the Greek term; but the religious requirements determined the usage in the long run, and first for the Christian religion, then for the books which enshrined its origin, the term διαθήκη was taken over from the Jewish and the pagan vocabulary to express the free and final order of grace which had been inaugurated by Jesus Christ.

The process of transition is easily traced.

Twice in the New Testament this conception of the Christian religion as the new and final "covenant" of God with men emerges, and each time with a special emphasis. In an anonymous homily, the so-called *Epistle to the Hebrews*, the writer

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explicitly claims that the Jeremianic prediction of the new covenant has been fulfilled in Christianity, which supersedes the first covenant at Sinai. He is much more interested in the climax of Jeremiah's prediction than in its contents; that is, the significant feature of it for him is the divine assurance of forgiveness rather than the anticipation of a direct, intuitive, and universal knowledge of God. But he goes on to make a further use of the covenant-idea, which is his own. The nearest equivalent for the Hebrew term *berith* was this Greek word, διαθήκη, which had a variety of associations; it was a fluid, flexible term, ranging from "contract" to "will" or "disposition." It was not only the equivalent for "covenant" in the Old Testament sense of the term, but for a "will," and the writer plays upon this double sense. He interprets this divine "will" of the Christian religion, which could not come into force till the testator had died. That is, he avails himself of the ambiguity in the term to bring out the essential relation of Christ's death to his religion. The testator's death must be proved before the terms of his will can be operative. *In the case of a will, the death of the testator must be announced. A will only holds in cases of death; it is never valid so long as the testator is alive.*[1] This is his illustration of the truth that the new covenant or will of God required the death of Jesus Christ, who brought it into being.

From another side, Paul uses the term, and again with a special contribution of his own. He, too,

[1] Heb. ix. 16, 17.

plays upon the double sense of the word. He can speak of God's promises to Abraham as a divine disposition or "will," and argue that no subsequent enactment like the later Sinaitic legislation can abrogate such a will. *To take an illustration from human life. Once a man's will is ratified, no one else annuls it or adds a codicil to it. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring; it is not said, "and to your offsprings" in the plural, but in the singular, "and to your offspring"—which is Christ. My point is this: the law which arose four hundred and thirty years later does not repeal a will previously ratified by God, so as to cancel the promise.*[1] His argument seems to be that the Sinaitic law, instead of being, as the Jews contended, the final form of God's covenant, was no more than a lower, temporary expedient, which could not stand between the original promise of God to Abraham and its fulfilment in Jesus Christ. Like Stephen, he argues in a way which affords no support to the modern theory that later developments in a religion are invariably a growth of true power. But, apart from this, we notice how Paul lays stress upon the voluntary, gracious element in διαθήκη or covenant, and illustrates his point by means of a well-known juristic analogy, which depends upon the juristic sense of the Greek term. As he reads the Old Testament, God's promise to Abraham meant that those who succeeded to Abraham's attitude of filial faith were Christians, and that non-Jews, not simply Jews by birth, were intended. The divine promise

[1] Gal. iii. 15–17.

was a disposition, which came into full operation under Jesus Christ, and depended on nothing like circumcision or observance of the law, things which were not in existence when the will was drawn up. Paul does not directly raise the question of the testator's death, as the author of Hebrews does. He simply uses the legal sense of διαθήκη in his illustration to bring out the decisive, divine character of the "disposition," and the essential quality in it of promise.

Elsewhere he uses διαθήκη in its ordinary sense of "covenant," to contrast Judaism and Christianity. The one is old, the other is new; the one is external, the other is of the Spirit. God, he writes, *has qualified me to be the minister of a new covenant—a covenant not of written law, but of Spirit.*[1] This is the climax of the religious development which starts from Jeremiah's prediction, as Paul reads the history of religion. But he goes on[2]—and this is the point which concerns us—to use "Old Testament" or "covenant" in its applied sense. For, he adds, *to this very day, when the Old Testament is read aloud*, a veil hangs over the Jewish mind in the synagogues, obscuring its true meaning. *Veiled from them the fact that the glory fades in Christ*—the glory of the Sinaitic covenant. Here for the first time the Jewish scriptures are called by a name which really describes their religious content. We are not surprised that a similar transition took place before long in the usage of "new testament." True, a full century was to pass before the classical Christian documents

[1] 2 Cor. iii. 6. [2] 2 Cor. iii. 14, 15.

were called "The New Testament," but the step was natural, when it was believed that Christianity was the new order of religion, the new and true relationship between a gracious God and men, resting upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. By the last quarter of the second century the title seems to have been coined. Melito, the Bishop of Sardes (170–180) uses the Greek term "Old Testament," and it may be inferred that he employed "New Testament" also.

The final stage in the evolution of the name, "New Testament," was reached when the Greek term had to be rendered into Latin. We are familiar with the rendering "Testament." But for a while it seemed as if another would predominate. Thus Tertullian is fond of "instrumentum," which appealed to his juristic mind. He calls the Bible an "instrumentum" or document, i.e. a carefully written document which might be adduced in proof of certain statements. The term is applied to the Old Testament or to the New as a source of divine proof and authority. But eventually this term flickered out of the Western Church, and it never obtained currency in the East. "Testamentum" became the normal term. Literally it denoted "will" or "testamentary disposition," but it was used as a convenient equivalent for the Greek διαθήκη in its broader sense of "covenant." Tertullian himself speaks of the "New Testament" (*novum testamentum*), and ere long it had no rival, though oddly enough Erasmus at one time preferred "Instrumentum" to Testament as the title.

So the New Testament came to be—the collection and the name for it.

(*a*) Primarily it is a sequel. There was a New Testament because there had been an Old. If the old covenant was authenticated by a collection of sacred books, why should not the new covenant also have its authentic documents? So the early Church felt, by a more or less conscious instinct. It was they, not the Jews, who coined the term "Old Testament" for the Jewish canon which was their bible to begin with. And in coining "New Testament" they marked at once a religious contrast and continuity. Christians regarded their sacred books as the record and title of their inheritance from God, who had fulfilled in the Lord Jesus the promises which had been the hope of Old Testament religion. The appearance of Jesus Christ, which is the *raison d'être* of the New Testament literature, was for them the pledge of God's irrevocable good-will and redeeming grace, a proof of His character as the God of love acting freely within history, such as the Old Testament had not been able to furnish.

(*b*) This idea of historical sequence, which linked Christianity to the past history of Israel, implied a decisive and final expression of the divine will for the Christian Church. The very name of "New Testament" indicated and vindicated the positive estimate of Christianity as the religion whose *diathêkê* or covenant was embodied once and for all in Jesus Christ. The inheritance of religious privilege to which Christians believed that they had

succeeded was summed up in the new order of sonship inaugurated by Jesus. His Person and Spirit were fundamental to this supreme relation of forgiveness and fellowship. Even a Jewish saint like Philo had already suggested that "covenant" denoted the personal revelation of God to man. "There are all sorts of covenants, apportioning graces and gifts to the deserving," he remarked,[1] "but the highest kind of covenant is God Himself." This tendency to heighten the personal, divine element in διαθήκη appealed to the early Christians. More than once, for example, a writer like Justin Martyr in the second century identifies Christ with the new covenant. "What is the covenant of God? Is it not Christ?" "An eternal and perfect law and a faithful covenant is given to us, even Christ."[2] This is to read the notion of "covenant" in the light of Jesus Christ, and the New Testament literature in its deepest reaches moves under the same impulse. The Christianity it embodies has no guarantee outside what Jesus was and did. It implies that the binding force of the Christian religion as a tie to God depends upon His character as expressed by the Lord Jesus. Consequently, when we use the term "New Testament" for this collection of books, we are approaching them along the faith of the early Church, which treasured these documents as evidence for the decisive place of Jesus Christ in history.

(*c*) It was this religious conception which led to the formation and fixing of the collection. The

[1] *De mutatione nominum*, 6, 8. [2] *Dial.*, 122, 10.

literary activity was dominated by a religious idea, in particular by the idea of finality which "covenant" implies.

"A mere collection of writings need not be closed. . . . But a collection of original documents at once tends to be closed, and a collection of original documents about a covenant carries with it inevitably the force of a closed and completed unity. Besides, it is certainly the case that a collection is always in danger of evaporating if it has not some boundary lines which are drawn at least ideally. . . . The idea which originated the New Testament as a closed collection was the strongly-held conviction that the new books were original documents of the second covenant which God had concluded through Jesus Christ." [1]

Harnack is right in urging this. He is also right in adding that the canon, once drawn up in this way by the Church, could not be regarded invariably as subservient to the Church.

"Once a sacred collection of documents is formed, it stands upon its own rights. Whatever may have been the circumstances of its origin, whatever number of forces may have gone to the making of it—all is forgotten, the moment the collection comes into existence." [2]

The Christian movement produced the Christian churches and through them the Christian scriptures; then came the further idea of collecting those scriptures into an inspired and authoritative canon. But once formed, this canon proved itself possessed of powers which tended to make it almost independent of the Church in which it had been drawn up. These powers, however, were faintly felt in the early Church. The function of the New Testament

[1] Harnack, *Die Entstehung des N.T.*, pp. 24, 25
[2] Harnack, *Entstehung des N.T.*, p. 77

as a standing criticism of the Church, as the embodiment of principles to which Christians required to be recalled, was not vividly realized. It is indeed only in creative epochs that the New Testament is heard recalling the Church to methods and motives which she is in danger of forgetting or ignoring. Nevertheless, this function exists. Two of the main problems of the New Testament lie in its relations respectively to the Old Testament which preceded it and to the Christian Church which produced it. The former of these problems was first to occupy the Church. But the latter is always pressing for restatement, and, as we shall see, it touches some of the most delicate and debatable questions in Christian procedure. To ask it properly, however, and much more to answer it, is not feasible until the former problem has been faced. We shall therefore look, to begin with, at the position of the Old Testament in the New.

CHAPTER III

THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE NEW

IN approaching the New Testament we came upon a collection of books whose authors commonly assume (i) that their bible, the Old Testament, is inspired, and (ii) that it is an inspired prediction of Jesus Christ and his Church.

I

A plain instance of the former assumption is provided by the significant passage in the Second Epistle to Timothy, where the apostle is made to remind his young colleague: Remember, you have known *from childhood the sacred writings* (ἱερὰ γράμματα) *that can impart saving wisdom by faith in Christ Jesus.* This means the interpretation of the Old Testament in the light of the Christian faith, the common method of reading it as a long prediction of Jesus as the Christ or messiah. But then the author continues: *All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for amendment, and for moral discipline, to make the man of God proficient and equip him for good work of every kind. All scripture is inspired*—πᾶσα γραφὴ θεόπνευστος. Inspired, not inspiring; the idea of the Greek term is not that scripture breathes the divine Spirit

into its readers, although that is in itself a true thought, but that it is produced by the divine Spirit. The active function of scripture is recognized in what follows ; its educational service as a discipline of life is fully stated. But θεόπνευστος is passive, not active.[1] The writer regards scripture as Philo regarded it, from the supernatural point of view. And in this he is not alone. The writers of the New Testament vary in the use which they make of this principle, but those who have occasion to employ it are at one in presupposing its validity. The religious value of the axiom is perhaps illustrated at its best by a passage in Paul's Epistle to the Roman Christians (xv. 3, 4). He has been speaking of people who are troublesome on account of the petty scruples which they insist upon cherishing and pressing. He pleads with stronger Christians to bear with such people, and rather to suffer on account of the restrictions imposed by their sensitive consciences than break the unity of the Church by insisting on their own rights. Then, after quoting a text from the Old Testament, he continues: *All such words were written of old for our instruction, that by remaining stedfast and drawing encouragement from the scriptures we may cherish hope.* This is the ordinary view taken of the Old Testament ; it is meant for the training of Christians in such virtues as courage and cheerfulness under the friction of life within the Christian society. But Paul does not leave the matter there. He continues: *May the God who inspires stedfastness*

[1] This is proved clearly by Professor B. B. Warfield in *The Princeton Theological Review* (1900), pp. 89–130.

and encouragement grant you such harmony with one another! That is, the Christians are inspired for the duties of life by a living God. It is not clear whether Paul means that God inspires Christians through the words of the Old Testament, or whether His moral inspiration is larger than that derived from the reading of His Word. Probably the latter is in the apostle's mind. In either case, however, the vitality breathed into the soul comes from a living God, and the effect of the written word is due to His Spirit. The God who spoke in the Old Testament speaks still. While His words in the Old Testament were meant for the Christian Church of to-day, He reveals His mind afresh.

Hence, in the later books of the New Testament the consciousness of inspiration begins to apply to the Christian apostolic writings, as well as to the sayings of Jesus. We have come across this already (p. 44), but it is none the worse for being reiterated.

(*a*) Look at the remarkable reason given in the pastoral epistles for remunerating Christian ministers. *Presbyters*, says the writer, *who are efficient presidents are to be considered worthy of ample remuneration, particularly those who have the task of preaching.*[1] Here as elsewhere[2] in the New Testament this practical duty has to be urged, because it was a new thing in the religious world round the Mediterranean. Religious functionaries did receive maintenance in other religions, but it was not for teaching —with the possible exception of the prophets in Israel, who seem to have accepted support. Jewish

[1] 1 Tim. v. 17, 18. [2] This is the point of Gal. vi. 6.

priests and pagan priests had their dues paid to them in kind or in money, but not because they gave instruction, and in any case primitive Christianity had no priests. This religion had no place for them, as it required neither altar nor sacrifices on earth. As for teaching, Jewish rabbis maintained themselves by their trade, and although the peripatetic lecturers of the pagan world received sums from the audiences to which they delivered their lectures on ethics or philosophy, the early Christian presbyters were in a very different relation to their churches. The habit of giving money in support of presbyters, therefore, required to be trained; and consequently our author proceeds to inculcate the principle by quoting scripture in favour of it. He cites two sayings. *Scripture says, "You must not muzzle ox or ass when he is treading the grain," and "A workman deserves his wages."* The first quotation is from Deuteronomy,[1] a humane regulation which had been already applied by Paul to the right of an apostle to maintenance by the Christian community; he had allegorized it into a divine care, not for oxen, but for Christian ministers. It is the second scripture which is most important for our present purpose. *The workman deserves his wages* is a saying of Jesus, in his commission to the seventy disciples, which is preserved in this form by Luke's gospel alone (x. 7). Paul had had it in his mind when he was arguing[2] from the Deuteronomy passage, for, in concluding his argument, he clinches it, as it were, by appealing to this authoritative

[1] xxv. 4. [2] 1 Cor. ix. 7–10, 13, 14.

precedent in the words of Jesus : *as men who perform temple rites get their food from the temple, and as attendants at the altar get their share of the sacrifices, so,* he argues from contemporary sacerdotal and ritual methods to the methods of a religion which was not sacerdotal, *so the Lord's instructions were that those who proclaim the gospel are to get their living by the gospel.* It is remarkable that this saying of Jesus was brought into prominence so early in the Church. It is almost as remarkable that it should be bracketed with an Old Testament quotation. If it is considered unlikely that Luke's gospel was written when the pastoral epistles were composed, then the reference is probably to some collection of gospel sayings current in the Church. But in either case, a written gospel document is embraced under the category of *Scripture,* on the same footing as the Old Testament. Both alike are inspired and authoritative.

(*b*) Even within the limits of the New Testament itself a similar attitude is presented, with regard to the Pauline letters. The author of Second Peter, which is a late document, looks back to them as already in a sense scriptural documents. *As,* he says, *our beloved brother Paul has written to you in all his letters—letters containing some knotty points, which ignorant and unsteady souls twist (as they do the rest of the scriptures) to their own destruction.* The Pauline epistles have by this time, i.e. by the first quarter of the second century, become debatable ground ; various interpretations of their teaching are current, and apparently serious mis-

conceptions. They are being read, studied, and quoted by different circles of Christians, who treat them ὡς καὶ τὰς λοιπὰς γραφὰς. Already Paul's epistles had been collected, and the collection formed part of the Christian Scriptures, i.e. of the Old Testament writings and the writings produced by the Christian Church. The application of inspired authority to written apostolic documents was extending.

It is true that the historic sense no longer allows us to infer so lightly from the pages of the New Testament what it seems to claim for itself as an inspired collection. Several familiar phrases in this connexion turn out to be irrelevant. Some of them really refer to the Old Testament. Thus, *the scripture cannot be broken* occurs in a dialogue[1] between Jesus and the Jews of Jerusalem, who are attacking him for blasphemously claiming to be divine. "'Divine'?" says Jesus, "why, the Old Testament actually calls its hearers divine! *Is it not written in your Law, 'I said, you are gods'?*" The Fourth Evangelist here makes him quote a phrase from the 82nd Psalm, for *the Law* here as elsewhere is a generic title for the Old Testament, and therefore includes the psalter. "*If the Law said they were gods, to whom the word of God came—and scripture cannot be broken—do you mean to tell me, whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am God's son'?*" This aside may be no more than an ironical argument *ad hominem*; but in any case it expresses what Jesus or the Fourth Evangelist believed about the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament.

So with the phrase, *the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.*[2] This has nothing to do with the modern antithesis between literal and spiritual. The contrast which Paul draws is between the written code of the Old Testament Law and the new breath of the Spirit in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament code, he says, is the death of religion; it is the gospel which is vital and vitalizing. Modern folk have twisted the English phrase into meaning that you should get the sense and inward drift of the Bible, without binding yourself to the literal words.

[1] John x. 35. [2] 2 Cor. iii. 6.

Not an unwholesome idea, but it is not what the apostle intended; and he certainly was not thinking of Christian scriptures at all, for there were no written standards or embodiments of the gospel at this time.

The gradual extension of the idea of inspiration from the Old Testament to the writings produced within the primitive Church may be illustrated by the usage of a Greek term (*τὰ λόγια*), which is rendered "oracles" in our English version. In classical Greek it was practically equivalent to *χρησμοί* in the sense of what was believed to be a divine utterance or revelation, possibly enigmatic, but certainly authoritative. When the Alexandrian Jews rendered their Old Testament into Greek, it denoted God's word or message. The Septuagint sense is "utterances or oracles of God." Then in Philo it means specifically the Old Testament scriptures, as the written law or revelation of God to His people. Philo indeed has three different terms for the Old Testament, *οἱ χρησμοί, αἱ γραφαί,* and *τὰ λόγια,* and when he wishes to emphasize the unity of the scriptures, he calls them by the singular: *ὁ χρησμός, ἡ γραφή,* or *τὸ λόγιον.* The New Testament never uses *χρησμός* ("oracle"), but we are not surprised to find *τὰ λόγια* twice applied to the Old Testament. Stephen, like Philo, speaks of the Sinaitic legislation as the *living words* (*λόγια ζῶντα*) which Moses received *to be given to us,*[1] while Paul declares that the primary privilege of the Jews was that *they were entrusted with the scriptures of God* (*τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ*).[2] At the same time the New Testament does not imply a

[1] Acts vii. 38. [2] Rom. iii. 2.

silent God, a God who had once spoken, and whose message was enshrined in the Old Testament. The prophetic impulse was alive within the early Church. The primitive Christians claimed to possess the same Spirit as had inspired the Old Testament, and among the functions of the Spirit was the gift of inspired utterance. Hence we find the term λόγια twice employed for the present revelation of God. The author of First Peter observes: *if any one preaches, he must preach as one who utters the words of God*[1] (ὡς λόγια θεοῦ), i.e. as a man conscious of speaking for God and from God, not out of his own initiative and wisdom. The meaning is not that the preacher must use Bible language; what the writer has in mind is the idea of a man communicating a divine message, instead of displaying his own abilities. No New Testament prophet or apostle uses the Old Testament phrase, *Thus saith the Lord*,[2] but this is equivalent to it. "Logia" is used in a similar but even broader sense by the author of Hebrews, who reproaches his readers with still requiring some one to instruct them about *the rudimentary principles of the divine revelation* (τῶν λογίων τοῦ θεοῦ).[3]

Eventually the book-sense of the term reappears in Christianity as in Judaism. When the New Testament writings became more and more authoritative, we find first the gospels and ultimately the

[1] 1 Peter iv. 11.

[2] The nearest approach to it, perhaps, is the explicit claim of the prophet John for his messages to the Asiatic churches: *Let any one who has an ear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches* (Rev. ii. 7, etc.)

[3] Heb. v. 12.

New Testament itself described as τὰ λόγια. The predicate of inspiration was thus carried over from the Old Testament to the New Testament collection.

All this, however, was gradual and, to begin with, unconscious. The point to bear in mind, historically, is that the early New Testament writings were composed by and for people to whom the Old Testament, generally in its Greek version, was the Bible. They were the true Jews; theirs was this book of God. In it they found their credentials for the past and their hopes for the future, in short, the explanation of their position as the community which looked up to Jesus Christ as the final revelation of God's redeeming purpose in history. The Old Testament revealed three things: the People of God, the Law, and the Temple. These were bound up together in a vital unity. Christians served themselves heirs to all three, but in no uncritical sense. The New Testament itself shows how slowly and how painfully they began to realize what was implied in the radical attitude of Jesus to all three, and indeed to the Old Testament itself. At the same time, what concerns us here is to mark how the fundamental value of the Old Testament for them lay in its predictions of Jesus as the messiah of God, and how the conviction of this affected their estimate of themselves and of him.

II

The Christian Church started with the conviction that the Old Testament predictions and promises had been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The fulfilment

was expected, and yet it was unexpected: that was the tragedy of the situation. But the New Testament is written in the full belief that the Old Testament pointed forward to such a realization of God's purpose as the life of Jesus offered. To quote only one illustration of what is written all over its pages. The gospel of God about Jesus Christ His Son was a new thing, but it had been foretold, Paul claimed, in the Old Testament; God had *promised it long ago by his prophets in the holy scriptures.*[1] The following arguments are studded with specific quotations from the Old Testament, in order to prove this point. And such a method pervades the New Testament as a whole, in its historical as well as in its argumentative passages.

(i) This habit of quoting from the Old Testament —I pass over citations from Jewish literature which is uncanonical—requires to be weighed. "When I read any early rabbinic document such as the *Mechilta*," says Mr. Montefiore, "I feel as if an advantage of Christianity over Judaism was that it made a fresh start."[2] As the *Mechilta* is not likely ever to dawn upon your horizon, I had better translate a paragraph from it, in order to let you see what Mr. Montefiore means. Here is its comment upon Exodus xiii. 18: *But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea.*

"Rabbi Eliezer[3] says: 'Way,' i.e. to tire them out, as it

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[1] Rom. i. 1–3. [2] In *The Beginnings of Christianity*, i. 37.

[3] Two learned authorities of rabbinical Judaism, belonging to the second generation (A.D. 90–130), who generally differed in their interpretations.

is said (Ps. cii. 23), 'He weakened my strength in the way, he shortened my days,' etc.; 'the wilderness,' i.e. to purify them, as it is said (Deut. viii. 15), 'who led thee through the great and terrible wilderness,' etc.; 'the Red Sea,' i.e. to test them, as it is said (Ps. cvi. 7), 'our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt, they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; but provoked thee at the sea, at the Red Sea.' Rabbi Joshua[1] says: 'Way,' i.e. to give them the Law, as it is said (Deut. v. 33), 'you shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God hath commanded you'; further (Prov. vi. 23), 'For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life'; 'the wilderness,' i.e. to let them eat manna, as it is said (Deut. viii. 16), 'who fed thee in the wilderness with manna,' etc.; 'the Red Sea,' i.e. to work signs and wonders for them, as it is said (Ps. cvi. 21), 'They forgot God their Saviour, who had done great things in Egypt, wondrous works in the land of Ham, and terrible things by the Red Sea'; further (ver. 9), 'He rebuked the Red Sea also, and dried it up.'"

The *Mechilta* is an exposition of a dozen chapters in Exodus, which embodies some rabbinic traditions of the first century A.D., and which is of importance for this reason, for the parables it contains, and also for some parallels to the language of the Fourth gospel, for example. It is full of citations from the Old Testament. So is the New Testament, but the New Testament is literature which moves forward under a vital, creative impulse. Hence its use of the Old Testament is much less encumbered and meticulous. At the same time, the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament is not fully intelligible except in the light of such contemporary rabbinic exegesis. For example, literary criticism proves that in both "quotations" so-called were often little more than telling illustrations, which carried associations of ancient authority without

[1] See footnote 3, p. 81.

any precise proof. This is true even of the rabbinical citations, now and then. Experts warn us that in the rabbinical writings, quotations from the Old Testament "are not intended always as absolute proofs of the doctrines and ideas in connexion with which they are adduced. A citation is often a mere μνημόσυνον, and as such may even be the more effective in proportion to the non-naturalness of its application."[1] So long as a quotation had the essential, special word, it would almost do. It might be quite appropriate, provided that it indicated indirectly and ingeniously the thought which the later writer sought to ratify. In the Mishna phrase, such a quotation would be "a mere supporting peg."[2] For example, there was a rabbinic prohibition of such actions as eating, drinking, and anointing oneself on the day of Atonement (*Joma* viii. 1). In the tract *Sabbath* (ix. 4) the question is raised: "Whence are we to infer that anointing is as illegal as drinking on the day of Atonement? Though there is no proof for this, yet there is one indication of it in the saying: 'Let it come like water into his inward parts and like oil into his bones.'" That is, the words of the curse in Ps. cix. 18 are quoted in support of this practice, simply because they bracket water and oil together. A literary method of this kind throws light upon some of the Old Testament quotations in the New Testament, where the effectiveness is not lessened by the fact that the words cited do not form a legal

[1] Dr. Charles Taylor, *Sayings of the Jewish Fathers*,[2] pp. 42, 43.
[2] See Streane's note in his edition of the *Chagiga*, p. 14.

precedent or even the basis for a logical inference.

This method was recognized long ago by that extremely "modern" father and scholar of the Church, Theodore of Mopsuestia, who pointed out that Paul quotes[1] the Old Testament not as a prophecy, but because the words suited his argument—a practice, he adds, which is still followed by church writers, who do not hesitate to use biblical quotations in a sense different from their original purport.

Considerations like this have to be kept in mind if we are to do justice to some of these quotations, instead of depreciating their force. For one thing, the Old Testament is generally quoted from the Greek version, and appeals are made to renderings which are not true to the original Hebrew. The historical and literary criticism of the Old Testament in our day often seems to reduce the effect of some allusions to it in the New Testament; they appear irrelevant and unreal, though never so much so as some of the similar efforts in the second-century literature of the Church. Indeed, it is not their original or historical meaning, as a rule, that lends weight to the Old Testament quotations in the New Testament. The quotation may be loosely reproduced, with words altered or omitted or even added. In these or in other ways, a new turn is given to a quotation; the author sees more in it than the literal words convey: he feels, as it were, that these old words looked and went beyond themselves, and that they are capable of a larger, deeper meaning. It is conceivable, of course, that this method of

[1] In Rom. iii. 12$_8$.

free quotation might become the channel of arbitrary and fantastic notions. What saves it from such an abuse is the moral and spiritual force of the new religious movement which employs it, in order to express and impress itself. The salient principle which underlies the Old Testament quotations in the New Testament is the sense of unity with the older religion, the combination of the appeal to antiquity with the conviction that the old is receiving a new and a true interpretation, and the instinctive sense that these ancient phrases are channels which may easily be shaped afresh for a fresh thought and by it. " The mere application of them is also a new creation. They are not dead and withered fragments of the wisdom of ancient times; the force of the new truth which they express re-animates them and re-illumines them." [1]

Approaching them along this line, therefore, we do find that they are often ingenious rather than appropriate. It has been pointed out, for example, that in Matthew's gospel the quotations made by Jesus are on a higher level than those which are due to the evangelist himself. Thus, *I will have mercy and not sacrifice* is twice quoted by Jesus, and to have brought out this flash of religious insight from the obscure prophecy of Hosea " shows not only a knowledge of the Old Testament, but also a real appreciation of the genius of Hebrew religion." [2] On the other hand, to quote from Hosea, *Out of Egypt I have called my Son* in connexion with the

[1] B. Jowett, *St. Paul's Epistles*,[3] i. 188.

[2] Burkitt, *The Gospel History and its Transmission*, pp. 202, 203.

story of the child Jesus being taken to and from Egypt, as the evangelist does,[1] as if this verse was a prediction of the story, is obviously less apt. "The fact remains, that the quotations from the Old Testament, which are given as quotations made by Jesus, show a very different degree of literary tact from those made by his followers." At the same time it is going too far to depreciate the latter *en bloc*. For example, nothing could be more apt than the use of another phrase from Hosea by the author of First Peter,[2] where he reminds his readers, who had been born pagans, that once they were *"no people," and now are "God's people," once were "unpitied" and now "are pitied."*

(ii) The next point is that historical criticism, by re-setting the problem of such messianic predictions in the Old Testament, has affected the estimate of them in the New Testament. We now know that while the Old Testament prophets occasionally made definite predictions, these were not in every case fulfilled. We also know that the New Testament writers attached a meaning to some Old Testament prophecies which was unhistorical, and left others out of account. We further know that the true connexion of early Christianity with the Old Testament prophecy is not to be deduced from isolated correspondence in detail—as even some of the New Testament writers suggest—but in the fact that Christ fulfilled the great ideals adumbrated in Hebrew prophecy at its best. These are elementary facts, which need only to be mentioned

[1] ii. 15. [2] ii. 10.

in this connexion. Historical criticism has rendered a true service to Christianity by relieving it of the necessity of accepting literally such attempts at a prophetic interpretation of the life of Jesus as are made, for example, by Matthew occasionally, as well as by indicating that even predictions of a similar kind made by New Testament prophets like that of the millennium in the book of Revelation are due to some passing mood of faith in a particular age. A much more important issue, however, is raised when we proceed to discuss the possible effects of this belief in predictive messianic prophecy upon the narratives of the life of Jesus.

(iii) The problem is this, in outline, with special reference to the five historical writings. Did any Old Testament stories or conceptions lead to the formation of narratives in the early Church? To what extent, if any, were early Christian traditions shaped or created by Biblical stories lying in a book which was held to reflect as well as to anticipate Jesus Christ? Or, to put another side of the problem, can we determine the extent to which some early Christian narratives were modelled upon Old Testament tales?

The gospels are not party-pamphlets,[1] any more than they are merely edifying devotional tracts, but the primitive traditions about Jesus were circulated and shaped during a period when the

[1] There is a slight and growing tendency to exculpate Pilate, but it has been often noted, e.g. that the closing record of the life of Jesus, from the betrayal to the crucifixion, is described without a single word of vituperation for the Jews

predominant interest of the Church was to prove from the Old Testament that he was the messiah. The gospel of the early Christian mission was predominantly messianic in character. Its apologetic turned upon proofs that Jesus, in his life, sufferings, death, and resurrection, had fulfilled the messianic rôle as represented in the Old Testament, which was God's book for God's people. Now, I think, it is no longer necessary to re-state the argument that Jesus himself had a messianic consciousness, i.e. that the belief in his messianic function is earlier than the primitive Church of his followers. Nor do I hold it necessary to demonstrate that the gospel story is not a mere imaginative representation of what was believed to be a messianic synthesis of ideas. The problem rather is this : Are any sections of the gospel story due to the naïve desire of presenting Jesus as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies ? How far, if at all, are some of the incidents or sayings merely a pious tale, which rests upon some Old Testament text ? Did the exigencies of controversy with the Jews lead early Christians to create as well as to recollect stories of their Master which bore out their claims on his behalf ? For example, the Galilean origin of Jesus was a difficulty. So was the fact of his suffering and death. Did the inevitable debate over such topics mould the historical tradition—as we read it, for example, in Matthew's gospel ?

Historical research answers this question unhesitatingly in the affirmative. The real issue is the extent to which it can be shown to have operated.

Apparently the possibility of this factor in the composition of the gospels was first suggested by a philosopher.[1] In his lectures on art, delivered at Jena in 1802–3, Schelling pointed out incidentally that the contrast between realism and idealism appeared already in the New Testament; he argued that the synoptic gospels told the story of Jesus in a Jewish spirit, embroidering it with fables which were due to the prophecies of the Old Testament; the synoptic writers, he added, "were convinced a priori that these events must have happened, since they had been predicted of the messiah in the Old Testament. We might say of them, Christ is a historical person whose biography was drawn up before his birth." This idea was worked out later by Strauss, whose account of Jesus sought to use the Old Testament as a source for large sections in the myth of the gospel story. Subsequent criticism has modified many of his suggestions and ruled out others, but the validity of the general idea is now beyond question.

There are signs that this interest in Old Testament prediction varied; indeed, it did not always command the same hearing. The circle for which the gospel of Matthew was written represents perhaps the maximum of interest in the subject. But compare Luke's gospel with its predecessors, on this point, and you detect a certain abatement, a slight tendency to omit[2] or alter the earlier allusions

[1] See Weidel in *Studien u. Kritiken* (1910), pp. 83, 84.

[2] E.g. the omission (xxii. 53) of *that the scriptures (of the prophets) might be fulfilled*, which Mark and Matthew put into the lips of Jesus.

to Old Testament predictions. I quote one instance of the latter. In the account of the table-talk at the last supper, Mark and Matthew make Jesus say : *The Son of Man goes the road that the scripture has described for him* (καθὼς γέγραπται περὶ αὐτοῦ). Luke[1] alters this into : *The Son of Man moves to his end indeed, as it has been decreed* (κατὰ τὸ ὡρισμένον). The sense is unchanged, in so far as Luke agrees with his predecessor that the tragic end of Jesus's life has been providentially arranged ; it is the fulfilment of a divine destiny, neither chance nor fate. All three evangelists are at one in assuming that Jesus was not taken aback, and that God was not thwarted by what happened. But Luke either felt a difficulty about particular passages in the Old Testament which would bear out the words *as the scriptures have described,* or else he felt that his readers would find a periphrasis more intelligible. We need not attach too much weight, however, to indications like this, as if they meant any departure from the recognized attitude towards the Old Testament prediction. Luke shows us elsewhere, especially in Acts, how congenial and characteristic this attitude was. It creates one of the real problems for the historical estimate of the gospel narratives.

This problem of the influence exerted by messianic predilection upon stories told about Jesus naturally forms part of the larger problem raised by the presence of " midrashic " influences in the New Testament. " Midrash " was the technical Hebrew term for exposition, and exposition of this kind, as we

[1] xxii. 22.

know already from the literature of the later Judaism, aimed primarily at edification; stories were told or re-told to illustrate some religious truth, without the strict regard to history which moderns desiderate.

"We have to bear in mind a fact familiar enough to students of the Talmudic and Midrashic literature, though apparently unknown to many expositors of Scripture, whose minds conspicuously lack that *orientation* which is an indispensable preliminary to a right understanding of the treasures of Eastern thought; I mean, the inveterate tendency of Jewish teachers to convey their doctrine not in the form of abstract discourse, but in a mode appealing directly to the imagination. . . . The Rabbi embodies his lesson in a story, whether parable or allegory or seeming historical narrative, and the last thing he or his disciples would think of is to ask whether the selected persons, events and circumstances which so vividly suggest the doctrine are in themselves real or fictitious. . . . To make the story the first consideration, and the doctrine it was intended to convey an afterthought, as we, with our Western literalness, are predisposed to do, is to reverse the Jewish order of thinking, and to do unconscious injustice to the authors of many edifying narratives of antiquity." [1]

This midrashic habit was one of the elements in the mental equipment of those who first drew up the tales about Jesus, and it has to be recognized here and there as a possible factor in their composition.

But with regard to the special question of the Old Testament prophecies as sources for New Testament "history," we must bear in mind further that the appeal to such prophecies largely turned upon two issues, the fact of Jesus as a suffering messiah, and the right of non-Jews to a place in the new messianic community, and that in both cases prophecy was called in to justify an accomplished fact.

[1] C. J. Ball, in *The Speaker's Apocrypha*, ii. 307.

(*a*) The former point deserves to be noted, not because there is any reasonable doubt as to the fact that Jesus did suffer and die, but because the sense that he thus fulfilled an Old Testament anticipation was probably present to his own mind as well as to that of his followers. The anticipation in question occurs in connexion with the prophecy of the Suffering Servant of the Lord (see above, pp. 24, 60).

At the outset, it should be observed that Jesus exercised sovereign freedom in interpreting the Old Testament; his reverence for it as God's Word went hand in hand with a frank criticism of its moral defects and at the same time with an independent view of its traditions. The instance I shall select is this. A late prophet of Judaism in the fifth century B.C. had predicted that the great reformer Elijah would return to earth in order to usher in the final era, and that he would fulfil a mission of preparation in Israel.[1] Jewish piety fastened upon this hope. One of the most widespread beliefs about the messianic age was that Elijah would reappear as the forerunner of the messiah. Jesus boldly identifies John the Baptist with this hero of popular expectation. Not that John had literally fulfilled the details of the ancient prophecy, but that Jesus with deep insight saw in him the herald of the imminent order of things which as messiah he himself was about to inaugurate. *If you care to believe it, he is the Elijah who is to come.* The important feature of this statement is

[1] It is expressed in literary form by the anonymous writer of Malachi iv. 5.

the freedom with which Jesus read the past and the present; the vital matter for him was not literal fulfilment of details but something deeper, not the reappearance of a dead prophet in supernatural form but the mission of an actual man. The absorbing interest of the disciples in this messianic scheme is reflected in the conversation after the transfiguration. It is plain that the appearance, or rather the disappearance, of Elijah in the vision had raised difficulties in their minds. How was this to be reconciled with the traditional expectation of his appearance prior to the messiah? So they put a question to Jesus on the subject: *Why do the scribes say that Elijah has to come first? He replied, "Elijah to come and restore all things? Why, I tell you that Elijah has already come, but they have not recognized him—they have worked their will on him. And the Son of Man will suffer at their hands in the same way." Then the disciples realized he was speaking to them about John the Baptist.*[1] The inference which Jesus means them to draw is that it would be as difficult for some to recognize him as his predecessor, and yet that a suffering and dying Elijah—such as tradition never anticipated—would naturally precede a messiah who would also suffer and die. John had died, and died without succeeding in bringing Israel to repentance. How then could he be the real Elijah? So the disciples argued to themselves. Jesus reassures them by laying stress on John's Elijah-relation to himself, in spite of appearances to the contrary, and at the same time leads them

[1] Matt. xvii. 10–13.

to infer that Elijah's fate will be his own fate.

To this we may add that Jesus was conscious of a rôle beyond that of any Old Testament prophet. This sometimes emerged in his talk. Thus he once asked the crowds who had previously thronged to the revival mission of John, *Why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and far more than a prophet.*[1] For John had been more than any prophet; he had not only heralded the kingdom of God but, as Jesus adds warmly, had been himself the object of prophetic prediction. Well, if John who inaugurated the mission of Jesus was estimated in this way, we can infer what must have been Jesus' consciousness of his own vocation.

Now all this prepares us to admit that he regarded himself as in the world to carry out such a vocation as that which had been attributed to the Suffering Servant of God in the later Judaism—in a passage which connects his death with human sin as in some way a vicarious offering. The application of the prediction to the death of Jesus is evident in the theology of the apostles, who interpreted the crucifixion of their messiah in terms of this ancient and profound passage. The interpretation seems to be earlier than Paul; it originated in the consciousness of the Church immediately after the resurrection. *I passed on to you,* says Paul, *what I had myself received, namely, that Christ died for our sins as the scripture had said.*[2] Luke describes the risen Jesus as teaching this to his disciples. *He said to them, "O foolish men, with hearts so slow to believe,*

[1] Matt. xi. 9. [2] 1 Cor. xv. 3.

after all the prophets have declared! Had not the Christ to suffer thus and so enter his glory?" Then he began with Moses and all the prophets and interpreted to them the passages referring to himself throughout the scriptures.[1] Historically there does not seem to be any valid reason why such a conception should not have been in the mind of Jesus himself. That contemporary Jews did not apply the "Suffering Servant" idea to messiah is not a sufficient reason for denying that it could have occurred to Jesus, unless we arbitrarily limit his originality and independence of insight. If it entered the mind of the primitive disciples, why should it not have been possible for him to interpret this supreme prediction as an anticipation of his own vocation? Does it not explain, as nothing else does, his allusions to his own sufferings as an essential part of the service he was rendering to God and man? I am disposed to think that the case for this hypothesis is fairly cogent, and that the fulfilment of such a rôle as that of the Suffering Servant was present to the mind of Jesus.[2]

(*b*) The second point is this.

As we have seen, the proof from the Old Testament was what finally legitimized Jesus as messiah, in the eyes of a Jew. Human tradition was not enough. The primitive disciples might give their evidence about what he was and what he did; but the

[1] Luke xxiv. 25, 26.

[2] This is well put by two Old Testament scholars, Sir G. A. Smith, in his *Jerusalem* (vol. ii. pp. 547, 548), and Prof. C. F. Burney, in *The Old Testament Conception of Atonement Fulfilled by Christ* (Oxford, 1920).

clinching question remained, was there any word of this in the Old Testament? To convince Jews, the disciples had to adduce anticipations and predictions from the Scripture. Now, the same held true when the mission made its appeal to the wider circle of those who were "God-fearing," i.e. pagans of religious interests, who had already been attracted by Jewish theism and morality. For pious folk in that age it was not enough to be assured that certain things had happened to Jesus; they must have been predicted in the Old Testament. This is a point of view which is sometimes ignored, and yet it is vital to any understanding of the literature and mental attitude of the primitive Church. The divine providential sanction and anticipation was what many devout people sought, as they examined the Old Testament in the light of what was reported about Jesus. Look at the story about Paul's mission to the town of Berœa in Macedonia. The local Jews, we are told, *were more amenable than at Thessalonica; they were perfectly ready to receive the word and made a daily study of the scriptures to see if it was really as Paul said.*[1] Observe what this means. Paul brought the historical outline of Jesus, the salient facts about his life and death and resurrection and mission, which proved him to be the messiah. The Jews in the synagogue did not discredit his statement. They were apparently willing to believe his facts. But in order to believe in Jesus they required to find an Old Testament verification. Was it the case that the messiah

[1] Acts xvii. 11.

should suffer and die? Had it been really predicted that he would rise again, and that he would gather non-Jews as well as Jews into his people? They took Paul's statements and compared them with the proofs which he alleged from the Old Testament. Where a modern would be satisfied with historical proof, they demanded the proof from prophecy.

Such a demand might create a supply of verifications when the gospels came to be written; it would at any rate lead to the discovery of what were supposed to be definite fulfilments of Old Testament prophecy in details connected with the life of Jesus. The dominant interest may be detected, for example, in a passage from the latest book of the New Testament, the so-called "Second Epistle of Peter," in which the author, speaking in name of Peter and the other apostles, declares that the apostolic tradition was trustworthy and first-hand. *It was no fabricated fables that we followed when we reported to you the power and advent of our Lord Jesus Christ; we were admitted to the spectacle of his sovereignty* (i.e *of his divine splendour*), *when he was invested with honour and glory by God the Father, and when the following voice was borne to him from the sublime Glory, "This is my son, the Beloved, in whom I delight."*[1] Here the writer claims the transfiguration of Jesus as an anticipation of his second advent. Then he proceeds to argue that the sight of the transfiguration was a historic fulfilment and confirmation of the Old Testament prophecies about the advent of Jesus. *That voice borne from heaven*

[1] i. 16, 17.

we heard, we who were beside him on the sacred hill, and thus we have gained fresh confirmation of the prophetic word.[1] By *the prophetic word* or message he means the Old Testament prophecies about the messiah. His readers are sent back to them, since their study is the preparation for a clear insight into Jesus Christ. *Pray attend to that word; it shines like a lamp within a darksome spot, till the Day dawns and the daystar rises within your hearts*[2]—meaning that the study of the messianic prophecies will throw light upon their faith in Christ, till the second advent dawns upon them. Only, of course, it is the study of the Old Testament in the light and on the lines of the apostolic tradition, since the historical evidence of the apostles offers a confirmation of the prophecies which is no illusion but a veritable proof. Then comes a bit of advice about the study of prophecy. *Understand this, at the very outset, that no prophetic scripture allows a man to interpret it by himself; for prophecy never came by human impulse, it was when carried away by the holy Spirit that the holy men of God spoke.*[3] Here we have the supernatural psychology of the age; prophecy in the Old Testament was the result of direct inspiration. So much is clear. What is not so clear is the preceding word about the interpretation of prophecy. But probably the writer means that as prophecy was inspired by the divine Spirit, so it must be interpreted by the divine Spirit, not by any individual who relies upon his own insight. *Private interpretation* conveys a wrong idea; it suggests a sectarian or isolated

[1] i. 18, 19. [2] i. 19. [3] i. 20, 21.

explanation, at variance with the catholic interpretation. But the writer is thinking of an interpreter who disregards the divine Spirit rather than the Christian Society, a man who reads prophecy *by himself*, apart from the Spirit which inspired it and which must inspire him if he is to find in it the dawning of Christ's messianic and divine truth. It would be interesting if we could take the passage to mean either that no prophet was fully conscious of what his own words implied, or that prophecy was too large and rich to be exhausted by its original or by any subsequent interpretation. But these excellent ideas are read into the text, which really confirms the prevailing view of the New Testament about the value and validity of the Old Testament messianic prophecies, including the extension of God's saving purpose to non-Jews.

However, whatever may be thought of particular biblical arguments for the latter which are adduced in the New Testament epistles, the vital point is that they are secondary to the fact itself. The gospel was taken to non-Jews on the terms of faith. Then, and only then, did the early Christians apparently feel the need of seeking authority in the Old Testament for their procedure: indeed it was the fact that this procedure was challenged which probably led to the first serious use of Old Testament predictions as a justification for the mission.

"Epoch-making" is one of the adjectives which we sometimes feel deserve a long rest. It is applied with more warmth than wisdom to events or writings in history which happen to strike the imagination,

especially of contemporaries, but which do not always deserve this rare description. But there is one sentence in the Acts of the Apostles which a trained historical judgment singles out as momentous. A year or two after the crucifixion of Jesus, when Stephen had been put to death by the irate Jews of Jerusalem for his radical criticism of the law and the temple, some of his adherents scattered for safety to the north-west. They were not content, however, to preserve their lives; they carried on an active propaganda up the sea-coast beyond the confines of Palestine, into Phœnicia, up to Syrian Antioch, and even to the island of Cyprus off the mainland. The majority adhered to the old line of the Christian mission, appealing simply to Jews. But some broad-minded spirits made a new departure. *Some were Cypriotes and Cyrenians, who on reaching Antioch told the Greeks also the gospel of the Lord Jesus.* And they did not tell it in vain. *A large number believed and turned to the Lord.* That is, for the first time, a Church was recruited from non-Jews.[1] To us the step seems natural and obvious. In reality, it was a daring innovation. That anyone of non-Jewish birth should become a member of the Christian Church was startling to most of the primitive disciples; it took long for a number of them at head-quarters to overcome their prejudices against this novel departure, and the conservatives in Jerusalem still clung to the view that such converts ought at least to be circumcised and made to observe the Jewish law, as Jesus himself had done. In

[1] Acts xi. 19–21.

short, this mission to the Greeks at Antioch was critical. We recognize here a watershed in the New Testament. Matters took a turn which proved momentous for the fortunes of the new religion. And you will observe that these innovators were not led by any apostle, nor, so far as we know, did they possess any explicit word of Jesus which warranted them in undertaking such a revolutionary campaign. Historically we allow that their impulse was true to the spirit of Jesus Himself, that they were doing something far more important than they realized, and that their action showed a deeper insight into the genius of the gospel than any of the apostles had as yet evinced. The Church at Antioch became the head-quarters of this liberal Christianity. Later on, Paul was brought into the movement and worked out its theology. But although Paul appeals freely to the Old Testament for anticipations of the mission to non-Jews, it is merely to justify a *fait accompli*. He does not, and we may be sure the original missioners did not, start from any Old Testament predictions; when these are adduced, it is simply to ratify a movement which originated in the Christian consciousness of what the gospel of Jesus involved, in the sense that somehow the appeal of the Lord Jesus could not be confined within racial bounds.

In allowing for the creative influence of beliefs about the Old Testament upon the formation or fashioning of primitive Christian stories, we must recollect facts like these. There were movements for which only Old Testament credentials were required; they themselves were already in existence.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW TESTAMENT IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

IN approaching the New Testament we at once recognize that it cannot be isolated; on the one hand, it is vitally connected with the Old Testament, as we have seen, and on the other it requires to be viewed in the light of its relation to the Christian Church. It had antecedents and it had consequences. The former were in part the cause of the latter. This has already emerged in our discussion. We shall now pass on to glance at the use of the New Testament by the Church, in order to trace the rise of the historical method.

I

No sooner did the Church of the second century secure its New Testament writings than it found itself obliged to safeguard its treasure; difficulties at once arose, which compelled thoughtful men to explain the New Testament to members of the Church as well as to outsiders. These difficulties originally started from the very fact that the Christian Bible now consisted of the Old Testament and the New Testament together. What the Church did was to refuse two courses; she (i) would neither

abandon the Old Testament—which, of course, would have meant that the favourite argument from prophecy would collapse, nor would she (ii) withdraw the New Testament from her own people.

(i) While the New Testament's value had to be upheld against Jewish critics, who confined the revelation of God to the Old Testament, the controversy with Marcion and some of the gnostics obliged the Church of the second century to protest against the undue disparagement of the Old Testament. These schools might regard the New Testament as defective, or as in need of careful editing and analysis in order to bring out what they considered was the real esoteric sense of Christianity. But they relegated the Old Testament to an inferior position. The Church, on the contrary, insisted that both came from the same Spirit, differing only in degree of inspiration. Thus Irenaeus, even in subordinating the Old Testament to the New, argues that when Jesus spoke of the householder who *brought out of his treasure things new and old*, he meant unquestionably the two Testaments, both being " the revelation of one and the same householder, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ."[1] This is not a private opinion ; the conception runs through all the early writers upon Christianity. Perhaps the clearest statement of the principle is Origen's, in the *de Principiis* (iv. 6) :

" We may say that the inspired character of the prophetic writings and the spiritual quality of the Mosaic law shone out on man when Jesus came. For clear proofs of the inspiration

[1] iv. 9, 1.

of the Old Testament writings could not well be given before the advent of Christ; it was the advent of Jesus that exhibited the law and the prophets as records made by the gracious aid of heaven, instead of being liable to suspicion as not really divine. Anyone who reads the words of the prophets with careful attention will experience within himself by his very reading of them a trace of inspiration, and by means of this experience he will be convinced that what we firmly believe to be words of God are no mere compositions of man."

Origen in Alexandria, like Tertullian in Carthage, regarded the proof from prophecy as much more important than the proof from the miracles. His view of inspiration is a curious anticipation of Coleridge's saying: "The words of the Bible find me at greater depths of my being; and whatever finds me brings with it an irresistible evidence of its having proceeded from the divine Spirit." But the central point of the passage is the interest in the Old Testament as a collection of writings which foreshadowed the Christ of the New Testament, which was only intelligible in the light of the gospel, and which revealed its true character to the susceptible Christian reader.

Yet, even in preserving the Old Testament for the faith of the Church, the second and third centuries blurred the right, historical relation of the Old Testament to the New. The apologists, in developing their religious philosophy, elaborated a system of truths for which the revelation of Jesus Christ served as the ratification. One of the principal defects of the Logos theology was its tendency to depreciate history and to reduce Christianity to little more than the final form of a natural, spiritual

religion which had been ever present in the Jewish and pagan world. Or again, the Old Testament was freely allegorized, just as Homer was by contemporary Greek moralists. We can understand how this allegorizing was essential; in the absence of a true historical sense, it was probably the only way in which the Old Testament could be held fast by the Church of that age. Besides, when the Alexandrian scholars allegorized the Old Testament, they were unconsciously promoting the emancipation of the Christian mind from a narrow bondage to the letter of the Bible. In the fourth century "it must be confessed that what greatly fostered credulity and error among educated Christians was the literal interpretation of Scripture which held the field in spite of Alexandrian allegorism."[1] Nevertheless, the historical relation of the Old Testament and the New was hardly grasped, even by the majority of theologians, and the study of the New Testament suffered. It was studied and studied with a certain detachment, for while some argued from the Old Testament to the New, others worked back from the New to the Old. Yet the dogmatic interest, as well as the apologetic, which relied largely on the allegorical method, seriously hampered any historical estimate of the New Testament itself.

(ii) An equally sound instinct kept the Church from attempting to foreclose the study of the New Testament. Whatever elements early Christianity may have assimilated from the contemporary cults, it never followed the mystery-religions by making

[1] H. F. Stewart, in *The Cambridge Mediæval History*, i. 581.

any secret of its sacred books. The Church did not invest the New Testament with any superstitious secrecy, as if it were too sacred to be put into the hands of any except those who had proved themselves worthy of so rare a privilege. There was nothing like the Hindu withdrawal of the inspired Vedic texts from the low-class Sūdras. Outsiders were invited and urged to read the book and see for themselves what the Church claimed to be the truth. Catechumens and Church members of all ages were instructed from it. The duty of reading it was pressed upon all and sundry. Ignorance of the Scriptures, said Chrysostom, is the source of all our evils in the Church.[1] Inquirers and neophytes alike were encouraged to read the Bible for themselves. There was a passing phase in which the so-called *disciplina arcani* became popular with some authorities, as was not unnatural; it tended to prevent Christian truths from being vulgarized by indiscriminate discussion among people who had no real interest in the subject. We can detect this tendency in Clement of Alexandria and, in a less healthy form, in Cyril of Jerusalem.[2] But in general the New Testament was quite accessible to members of the Church; it was the textbook of instruction, containing the oracles of God Himself, which were

[1] *De Lazaro* (Concio III, 3): μέγας κρημνὸς καὶ βάραθρον βαθὺ τῶν γραφῶν ἡ ἄγνοια . . . τοῦτο καὶ βίον διεφθαρμένον εἰσήγαγε.

[2] P. Batiffol (*Études d'Histoire et de Théologie positive*,[2] 1902) has proved that the "disciplina arcani" was not nearly so prevalent, except among the gnostics, as was once imagined; but traces of the tendency to shroud the Christian formulæ and rites from unbelievers are to be found as early as Justin Martyr.

intelligible to the laity as well as to the clergy, and read in private as well as in public worship. Restrictions might be placed upon public worship, the baptismal symbol might be safeguarded from publicity, but the New Testament was not seriously affected by such regulations. The one thing the early Church never attempted to do, amid all her difficulties, was to restrict or prohibit the reading of the New Testament by the rank and file. It is true that in one of his defiant moods Tertullian flung out the opinion that Churchmen should refuse to discuss biblical questions with heretics; all that came of that was a bilious headache! But this was one of Tertullian's brusque idiosyncrasies. What the early Church did, even in the days when wild and dangerous inferences were being drawn from the letter of the New Testament by untrained or subtle minds, was not to take the Scriptures out of the hands of her people. She did not even do with the New Testament what was sometimes done with the Old Testament by the Jews, i.e. withhold certain books from people till they were able to understand them. No New Testament book was reserved till people reached a certain age, as some rabbis advised should be done with the Song of Solomon and Ezekiel. The Church adopted other methods. (*a*) She drew up a brief statement of Christian truth, as we have seen (pp. 45 f.), to guide people in understanding what the New Testament really meant; the Tradition safeguarded believers in their reading of the Bible. (*b*) She put teaching more and more under the supervision of the bishops,

as the representatives of apostolic orthodoxy, when schools of Christian teachers and thinkers became dangerous. (*c*) And she encouraged the allegorical method of interpretation, in order to avoid some of the awkward difficulties raised by the literal text.

II

It is obvious, from what has been said, that the effects and influence of the New Testament cannot be traced definitely, for this reason, that they are bound up with those of the Bible as a whole. For centuries the Old Testament and the New Testament were held as a unity, equally inspired and alike authoritative. There could be no specific sphere assigned to the New Testament by itself. Its antecedents lay in the religion which is enshrined in the Old Testament, and the two were regarded as one for the purposes of the Church. All that was required was the growing Tradition of the Church, which became more and more dogmatic, and which merely needed Scriptures assumed to be inspired, in order to deduce any truth that had to be put forward. The interest in the New Testament was, like the monastic movement in its original phase, though less consciously and openly, a reaction against the sacerdotal and sacramental order of the Church. Just as monasticism meant a retreat of lay religion from the organized Church as well as from the world, a sense that the religious life could be lived more safely and nobly in a solitude which was more or less independent of ceremonies and clergy, so with

the study of the New Testament. Eventually both movements were drawn back into the service of the Church. Monasticism came to forward and even to lead the very Church from which it had originally withdrawn. And the New Testament was subordinated to the ecclesiastical tradition, especially in the West, where the study of the New Testament never flourished so freely as in the East. The reasons for this stress on the Creed or on tradition are quite intelligible from the point of view of history. Eccentric and arbitrary uses were being made of the New Testament, such as in modern days we know, if we look into swarming sects like the Second Adventists, the Plymouth Brethren, or Christian Scientists. It was convenient for the Catholic Church to develop Tradition, and to have in the Creed a clear epitome of the salient truth which Scripture contained, a standard by which people could be educated and disciplined. The possibilities of error, owing to a conceited or speculative exegesis of the New Testament, were a real danger, as honestly felt by the Church in the fourth century as in the fourteenth, when the perils of indiscriminate reading of the New Testament suggested the inhibition of its circulation among the untrained masses. But there were less honourable motives at work also. The ecclesiastical tradition might be preferred to the New Testament, on other grounds; it is historically correct to argue that it was "more acceptable to the officials of an ecclesiastical system than the Scriptures; for these ever kept alive the truth of the universal priesthood and afforded to the

reader independent and free converse with God." [1]

The equalizing value set by Tradition upon both Testaments, therefore, prevented the New Testament from exercising its due and pre-eminent influence upon the Church. It was not the New Testament, it was the reading of the uncanonical Acts, the Acts of Paul, of John, of Philip, of Peter, and so forth, which was responsible for the unhealthy stress on celibacy and the morbid antipathy to marriage during the second and the third centuries, and which eventually emerged in some forms of monasticism. For such predilections men had usually to go outside the New Testament. It was not the New Testament which encouraged the rise of sacerdotalism and clericalism in the early Church. The moment these begin to appear, their advocates generally appeal to the Old Testament.

At the same time it has to be admitted that, to begin with, the dogmatic method did not tyrannize over the New Testament. The attitude towards translations is a case in point. The early Church—or at least some of its leading authorities—soon took over the Jewish legend that the translation of the Old Testament into Greek had been inspired. There was a logical necessity about this inference; the Septuagint, to be a divine book, must have arisen under the same conditions of direct inspiration as the Hebrew original which it translated. The curious thing is that this inference was never extended to cover translations of the New Testament. By the second century the requirements of pro-

[1] Harnack, *Bible-reading in the Early Church*, p. 138.

paganda had led to versions of part of the New Testament in Syriac and Latin ; but these originated spontaneously, and never acquired any halo of direct inspiration such as the Septuagint had gained. Just as the early Church, with all its claim to possess in tradition the legitimate standard for interpreting the New Testament, did not assert that it was an infallible interpreter, so it never felt the need of claiming inspiration for its early versions of the sacred book. A priori it might be argued that an inspired, authoritative book involves equal inspiration for any version of its text and also an infallible interpreter of its meaning. The early Church, however, did not live on a priori deductions. It was not till later that Tradition became infallible and authoritative, and the Vulgate an inspired, the inspired, text of the New Testament.

III

The New Testament speaks about *the powers of the life to come* [1] as part of the Christian experience ; there were of course problems even then with relation to eternal life, but the problems were created and could only be solved by an experience of the *power*, and it is on the power that the stress falls. So with the New Testament itself in the early Church. The mere fact that it was read, and read eagerly, soon started problems. Men differed about what were the books that deserved to be included in the New Testament, and about what they meant. Along-

[1] Heb. vi. 5.

side of the uncritical, warm love of the New Testament, which was unconscious of difficulties, which found in the New Testament the answer to so many enigmas that it hardly dreamed of asking questions about it, alongside of this ran a stream of real inquiry, sometimes swollen by awkward criticisms from the outside, sometimes stirred by internal cross-currents within the Church itself.

From time to time this stream had to be reckoned with. The approach to the New Testament is not a new thing; in one sense it took place during the second century, when the great Christian thinker Marcion led the way in an attempt to present the New Testament in re-edited form as a strictly Christian collection of books, in order to bring out the distinctively Christian message. But Marcion's criticism was inadequate; his antipathy to the Old Testament, which was partly due to his intense sympathy with Paul, deflected his method, and the reaction of the Church led to that close association of the Old and the New Testament which persisted through the Middle Ages. The one fulfilled the prophecies and promises of the other. As both were extant in a common Latin version which was invested with inspired authority, and as the method of allegorizing employed by Church tradition drew from both the proofs of any dogmatic or ecclesiastical construction, there was little likelihood of the New Testament acquiring any specific position in the Church, even when the Bible was allowed any precedence among the miscellaneous authorities of tradition, although one or two of the New Testa-

ment books were occasionally discussed by themselves, notably the book of Revelation.

The change came with the rise of the new learning, and the revival of interest in ancient languages, especially in Greek. "At the Reformation," says Goldwin Smith, "Greece rose from the dead with the New Testament in her hand." The revival of classical learning and the revival of religion coincided at this point, to begin with. And we may add that the person who rolled away the stone and made this resurrection possible was, above all others, Erasmus. He avoided anything like a direct attack upon ecclesiastical abuses; his contribution was a reiterated emphasis upon the teaching of Christ, on faith instead of upon rites and dogmas, on an individual appreciation of the New Testament message. He pointed men back to the New Testament, away from the tiresome and irrelevant vagaries of the scholastic theology, insisting that the New Testament was intelligible and unambiguous to simple piety. It is true that he still clung to the allegorical method of interpretation; literal interpretation he regarded as superficial and secondary. But he had an instinct for what was vital in the New Testament—an instinct which worked and was bound to work fruitfully beyond the limitations of his own method. Above all, the impetus he gave to the sense that the one hope of regenerating Christianity lay in the fresh study of the New Testament, carried many to lengths which he himself feared and shunned. It was at bottom an appeal to facts, to the authoritative sources of Christianity instead

of to the authority of the Church. In the best sense of the term, Erasmus desired to make the New Testament a "popular" book, to have the gospels and epistles read by all and sundry, instead of being left to a scholastic caste.

"I utterly oppose the opinion of those who deny the common people the right to read the divine letters in the vernacular, as if Christ taught unintelligent mysteries which only a few theologians understand. . . . Would to God that the gospels and the epistles of Paul were translated into all languages, so as to be known not only by the Scotch and Irish, but by Turks and Saracens. . . . Surely the first thing is to make them intelligible. Many might ridicule them, but some would lay them to heart."

"Erasmus," says Pope, "that great injur'd name!" He suffered in theology from the Louvain ecclesiastics, who were acute enough to see the possible effects of Erasmus' edition upon the ecclesiastical *status quo*. For one thing, it suggested doubts about the Vulgate, on which the Church relied as the charter of her Biblical deductions; any work upon the Greek text such as Erasmus proposed to carry out by means of the Latin version tended to depreciate the latter. Furthermore, the publication of the New Testament, in the original and in a popular Latin version, especially when it was accompanied by notes or paraphrases, would set up in the popular mind a standard which conflicted with the Roman system of dogma and practice;[1] it would invite criticism of the *status quo*, and it might even prompt revolutionary efforts at recon-

[1] This impulse had been already felt uncritically in the Waldensian movement, by the end of the twelfth century, which sought to revive New Testament Christianity as the standard.

struction. But the movement of historical appreciation, started by Erasmus, could not ultimately be held back, although for a time reactionary tendencies in the Roman and in the Re-formed churches gained the upper hand.

It was thus really over the problem of the New Testament that historical criticism first gained a hearing within the Christian Church, when at the Reformation in the sixteenth century the traditional interpretation of the New Testament was frankly challenged. The issue was not, as it has been for ourselves during the past century, the historical meaning of Jesus Christ. It was rather the validity of the Roman church's claim to the New Testament as her title-deeds. That is, the burning question was the question of the Church, and the subsequent appeal to history on both sides, so far as it touched the New Testament, was upon the credentials of the Church. Such an appeal did not mean a very sound view of historical research. Practical interests were uppermost. New Testament data were wanted to support theological statements, and the result was that these data were sometimes approached from an a priori position ; all that was asked was a verdict in favour of a preconceived idea. The historian was apt to disappear in the advocate. Still, from the standpoint of historical science, it did involve an advance beyond the traditional acquiescence in the New Testament. The revival of classical studies at the Renaissance, carried on by men like Colet and Grocyn, and the effort made not only by theologians but by humanists like Erasmus to recall men

to an interest in antiquity—and antiquity in this connexion was bound up with the study of the New Testament—all this helped to create and foster a mental atmosphere conducive to a new interpretation of the original Christian documents. It was history with an object, no doubt; Casaubon was one of the first to enunciate the modern demand for truth as the sole end of historical research. Still, it was something gained when documents were being studied critically, and when the historical method was applied to documents which had hitherto been sacrosanct. The application might be in the hands of partisans, but it could not remain there.

An impetus came from the Romantic movement. A vivid interest in the past may indeed be mainly "romantic," either an antiquarian curiosity, as in England towards the end of the eighteenth century, or a source of pleasure by enabling us either to escape from the drab limitations of our contemporary setting or to find our interest and satisfaction in life enhanced by contrasting it with the remote, rough past. In the latter case, we have no desire to be what far-off folk were. It is our difference from them which is a comfort. Thus Sir Walter Scott, politically a Tory, woke to the interest of the past; in quiet times, when civilization is fairly settled, the mind may travel back to trace the far-off origins of the present, thankful that so wide a gulf separates us from our ancestors. Yet it was this Romantic movement which helped to stir the next practical interest in the New Testament. Newman was influenced by two Scotts: by Thomas Scott the com-

mentator, with his evangelical simplicity and unworldliness, and later by Sir Walter Scott, who paved the way for the Tractarian interest in earlier history. The deeper incentive to historical study awoke, i.e. the desire to trace in the past our own inheritance, the realization that it is our story which is being told, and that history may supply standards or principles for some reformation of the present. Thus the heightening emphasis upon the idea of the Church threw the leaders of the Oxford movement in last century back upon a new interpretation of early Church history, which involved a fresh valuation of the New Testament. The novel dogmatic estimate had to be verified by a re-examination of the records—again a partisan use of history, but one which, as at the Reformation, revived the historical interest. Only, the new factor of evolution was beginning to affect the study of Church origins as of all other social phenomena. The result is that to-day we find the New Testament mixed up with two keen discussions which are being carried on in the general philosophic study of the Christian religion. One is the problem outlined by Newman and restated by Loisy in his controversy with Harnack, the problem of what the New Testament means in the light of Christianity as a growth which alters its shape through the centuries without losing its identity. The other is practically Lessing's old question, translated from the eighteenth century into the categories of modern thought by a writer like Troeltsch—how can an absolute religion, such as Christianity claims to be, enter into so relative

an order as that of human history? These two problems open up far-reaching issues. They raise philosophical and religious questions which are beyond the special survey of New Testament criticism. Yet both affect the New Testament. Both press the query, how far, and in what sense, is the New Testament the final expression of the Christian religion?

IV

Meantime the historical method of approach came into play.

The phrase and even the idea, in a rudimentary form, are as old as Dr. Priestley, who spoke of "the historical method" in the preface to his book on *The History of the Corruptions of Christianity*.[1] Priestley's method was energetic but somewhat crude. He undertook to expose the deviations of contemporary Christianity from its original line, and to remove the impurities and innovations which, in his view, had prevented the true scheme of the faith from being recognized by the world. In this investigation he set himself "to trace every such corruption to its proper source and to show what circumstances in the state of things, and especially of other prevailing opinions and prejudices, made the alteration, in doctrine or practice, sufficiently natural, and the introduction and establishment of it easy." But apart altogether from his ideas of the essence of Christianity, his conception of what was required for his argument was correct; he saw that the historical method was "one of the most

[1] Preface to ed. of 1782, vol. i. p. xiv.

satisfactory modes of argumentation." In other words, he felt that it is never enough to disprove or denounce an assertion; you must show how and why it ever came to be made. Now this sense of the historical method was caught up. One of the services rendered by Baur, e.g., was that he asked not only how certain things happened in the New Testament period, but why—why then and not earlier or later, why thus and not otherwise. Priestley was a quick-witted amateur; there was more quicksilver than silver in his work. Baur came immediately after him, and Baur was a trained scholar; in his stronger hands the historical method first showed how fruitful it could be in handling the New Testament documents. For the first time it was shown that these documents were unintelligible apart from a movement of thought, that this movement was manifold, that antagonistic views prevailed in the primitive Church, and that the genetic conception of the New Testament implied a recognition of the various stages in the controversy. Like all pioneering work, Baur's had to be re-shaped. He dated the gospels too late, for example, and he misinterpreted the relation of Peter to Paul. But the principles of literary and historical research were now introduced into New Testament criticism. Since Baur wrote, they have been improved, but never seriously questioned.

Recent developments of the historical method have been for the most part connected with (*a*) the language and (*b*) the presuppositions of the New Testament. Apart from advances in textual criti-

cism, i.e. the science of ascertaining the true text of the documents amid the accidental or deliberate alterations made by later ages, (*a*) the linguistic problem has commanded most attention. The vernacular of Palestine in the days of Jesus was Aramaic, with its three dialects, characteristic of Galilee, Samaria, and Judæa. But the New Testament is a Greek book. Its Greek was the Greek practically current over the Roman Empire, especially for purposes of trade and education. Jews in Egypt and elsewhere outside Palestine spoke it as a rule. The Empire for the most part was bi-lingual. Greek as well as Latin was spoken by the majority of the educated, at any rate ; the emperor Claudius called Greek and Latin "our two languages." [1] Hence the primitive missionaries had few linguistic troubles ; these only became serious in the second century. The diffusion of Greek was therefore a channel already cut for the stream of primitive Christianity.

So long as the theory of verbal inspiration survived, it was possible to regard New Testament Greek as a special dialect of the Spirit who dictated not only the thoughts but the style of the New Testament writers. This delusion disappeared before the rise of the newer linguistic method. The existence of a common Greek vernacular, literary and non-literary, was proved, from the ostraka or broken potsherds, on which peasants scrawled occasional sentences, to inscriptions and papyri. The inscriptions came from all over Asia Minor and Greece,

[1] Suetonius, *Vita Claudii*, 42.

the papyri from Egypt. Their evidence goes to prove that this "common Greek" was the medium of ordinary intercourse, of business life and of literature, over the Roman Empire in the first century. Experts still dispute the extent to which this common Greek, as used by the New Testament writers, has been affected by the language and idioms of the Old Testament. Here and there the New Testament is little more than "translation Greek"; the Aramaic thought and syntax shine through the Greek translation. Even if the writer is not actually translating from Aramaic into Greek, he is thinking in the one language and writing in the other. We feel this especially in Mark's gospel and in the Apocalypse of John. But these debatable matters are minor and minute; they seldom affect the core of the New Testament. Indeed, the general linguistic results of research into the Greek vernacular during the first century have been interesting rather than important, from the religious point of view. Their importance, at any rate, is not fundamental. Nor can we say that the parallel effort to get behind the Greek of the gospels to the Aramaic vernacular has succeeded in altering the essential features of the situation, although for a time much was expected from this linguistic movement, as unreasonably in some cases as if one could hope to understand the talk at a dinner-table by studying the forks and spoons.

(*b*) Just as the revival of interest in Oriental studies during last century, which was due in part to the closer contact of Europe with the East, led

to a fresh understanding of the Old Testament, so the newer classical knowledge of Roman and Greek civilization has affected the study of the New Testament. Language, art, archæology, and philosophy have all contributed to the resetting of the primitive Christian books in their original environment. The advance here has been marked. The newer psychology and the development of archæology and anthropology have brought a new method into vogue, which has antiquated the older methods of treatment. This revival may seem tardy; it is comparatively recent. But is it much more tardy than in the study of Greek religion? It is scarcely a quarter of a century since Greek religion was mainly discussed from the standpoint of Aeschylus, Sophokles, and Euripides, as if these dramatists accurately and adequately represented popular religious feeling. Nowadays all this has changed. The ultra-literary method has been superseded by a range of vision which goes beyond literary documents, probing for evidence of popular Greek religion in the ritual of the cults, and availing itself of the resources of archæology. Vase-paintings, popular incantations, and prayers may be more important in this connexion than literary drama. A similar change has come over the study of New Testament religion. The background of rabbinic religion and of the contemporary cults in the Roman Empire, with their infusion of Orientalism, as well as of popular philosophy, has to be studied, in order that the social and religious presuppositions of primitive Christianity may be rightly understood. Questions

of organization and of belief, matters like sacrifice, prayer, visions, worship, and prophecy, require to be reset in the light of comparative folk-lore and religious development. Some of the explanations may be whimsical and far-fetched, but the method itself is sound.

All this is implied in the relativity of the historical method. But still more is involved. It becomes more and more plain that every separate incident or era in history must be viewed in a nexus larger than itself. Thus the rise of Christianity, as reflected by the New Testament, looks before and after. When we approach it, we are approaching a new thing in the history of religion, a new estimate of God and life. Yet, however original it may be, however much of a new departure it means, it remains part of a larger historical sequence. The religious movement in which it plays so commanding a rôle is to be understood not simply from the New Testament itself but from the history of the later Judaism and the Hellenistic environment of the period, and not merely from the antecedents of Christianity in the Old Testament and elsewhere, but from its consequences and effects in the subsequent centuries. The various conditions of thought and life within the Judaism and the Hellenism of the period, so far as we are able to discern them, often help to determine the sense of some special trend or particular allusion in the New Testament text. And then the subsequent history of Christianity as a living religion may be held to possess a certain value for our estimate of the New Testament itself or for any

particular feature in it. This is the problem to which I have referred, the problem of what Church tradition implies for the New Testament. Modern Christianity, in its dogmatic or ecclesiastical or ethical formations, has transposed New Testament religion more or less into another key. How far has this process been legitimate? How far is it necessary for Christianity itself to be transferred back into the key of the New Testament? To this latter problem we shall return in a moment. Meantime we confine our attention to the former, the strictly historical outlook upon the New Testament in its own age.

CHAPTER V

THE HISTORICAL METHOD AT WORK

INSTEAD of giving any further description of the historical method in general terms, I propose at this point to offer two specimens of it at work upon the text of the New Testament, choosing one passage from the primitive historical tradition about Jesus, and one from Paul's epistles, in order to bring out the variety and scope of the method.

I

Clearly as we can see the general historicity of the earliest traditions about Jesus, we have to recognize that even in Mark's gospel, which is commonly assumed to represent a more matter-of-fact tradition than is usually visible in the later gospels, the critical mind cannot approach the data without declining to accept them merely at their face-value. The material requires to be sifted, before it can be accepted as historical evidence. For example, we read how on one occasion Jesus fed a crowd of over five thousand people beside the lake of Galilee with no more than five loaves and a couple of fish. It is one of the earliest and best attested anecdotes of Jesus. The four gospels all

recount it, practically in the same outline; Matthew and Luke took it from Mark, substantially intact. In Matthew's version it runs as follows:

Jesus withdrew by boat to a desert place in private; but the crowds heard of it and followed him on foot from the towns. So when he disembarked he saw a large crowd, and out of pity for them he healed their sick folk. When evening fell, the disciples came up to him and said, "It is a desert place and the day is now gone: send off the crowds to buy food for themselves in the villages." Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away; give them some food yourselves." They said, "We have only five loaves with us and two fish." He said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to recline on the grass, and after taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven, blessed them, and after breaking the loaves handed them to the disciples, and the disciples handed them to the crowds. They all ate and had enough; besides, they picked up the fragments left over and filled twelve baskets with them. The men who ate numbered about five thousand, apart from the women and children.[1]

In the synoptic setting of the story there are slight variations. Mark and Luke, for example, make the retirement of Jesus follow the return of the disciples from their mission; Matthew, who has omitted the mission, suggests that Jesus retreated for safety, on hearing about the murder of John the Baptist, as though it was the Baptist's disciples who brought him news of their master's death at the hands of Herod. Again, Mark in telling the story says that Jesus in pity for the crowd *proceeded to teach them at length*; Matthew characteristically[2] changes this into healing, while Luke, who omits all reference to pity, combines both ministries, and

[1] xiv. 13–21.

[2] He does the same twice later, at xix. 2 and in the insertion of xxi. 14.

also identifies the locality as *the town of Bethsaida*, i.e. the town of that name on the eastern bank of the Jordan as it flows into the lake. But evidently this identification caused difficulties. Some manuscripts and versions either omit it, or alter *town* into *village* or *desert-place*. Here is a small problem for textual criticism as well as for topographical research; some geographers feel obliged to assume from the data of the gospel that there were two places called Bethsaida, and it has even been suggested[1] that *Bethsaida* here is a mistake on the part of Luke for "house of provision," which is literally its meaning, i.e. that the name was originally symbolic.

To these editorial changes, due to the characteristic tendencies of the three synoptic gospels, that of Mark having served as the basis for the other two, we must add one item: this is not the only anecdote of the kind told about Jesus. Shortly afterwards[2] both Mark and Matthew describe how he fed a crowd of over four thousand with seven loaves and a few small fish. It is a further problem for literary and historical criticism to decide whether these are duplicate traditions or independent tales—a problem allied to that of determining the relative merits of the three synoptic narratives. But the central question raised by them is that of their origin and meaning. The decision ultimately

[1] E.g. by Dr. E. A. Abbott in his subtle, detailed discussion of the miracles of feeding, in *The Fourfold Gospel: The Law of the New Kingdom* (ch. viii.).

[2] Mark viii. 1–9; Matt. xv. 32–38.

depends upon data which are beyond the strictly historical method; a supernatural view of Jesus might be held to carry with it the possibility of such a control of nature as would enable him to multiply food instantaneously. The tale is told simply and told as a miracle. Why not take it as such? But, even without assuming that Jesus had no more than ordinary powers over nature, we may raise the question whether such an anecdote cannot be explained along simpler lines. For example, it is significant that holy men in Syria were believed to have the power of multiplying food. This belief is enshrined in some old Testament traditions, notably in one of the legends about Elisha in the second book of Kings,[1] which tells how a farmer once presented the prophet with twenty barley loaves and a bag full of garden produce, and how the prophet used these to feed a crowd of a hundred people, probably guests or disciples of the prophet himself.

There came a man from Baal-shalisha, who brought the man of God some firstfruits as food, twenty barley loaves and a bag full of garden produce. The man of God said, "Give this to the crowd, that they may eat." "What!" said his servant, "am I to put this before a hundred men?" But the man insisted, "Give it to the crowd, that they may eat; for this is what Yahweh says, They shall eat and leave some of it over." So he put it before them, and they ate and left some over, as Yahweh had predicted.

The servant hesitates; the man of God insists, relying upon his God; and not only are the people

[1] iv. 42–44. The present is an illustration of the material provision made for a prophet, to which I have referred already (p. 73).

satisfied, but some food is left over. The parallel with the New Testament story is patent.

In this connexion it is natural to ask whether contemporary folk-lore does not offer any parallels to this story. There is a miraculous tale of the kind about the Jewish rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, who lived about A.D. 70, and Buddhistic literature contains a legend about the Buddha feeding five thousand men from a poor woman's little store, till they were satisfied and left some provisions over. But both tales are much later than the gospels, the Jewish being attributed to the authority of a rabbi late in the third century, and the Buddhistic being later still. Neither, not even the Buddhistic, necessarily reflects the gospel story. Both belong to the naïve soil of stories like those about Elijah or Elisha, which indeed they resemble. Their origin is probably due, not to any influence of the Christian nor even of the Hebrew tale, but to the operation of similar beliefs about holy men. The question of Buddhistic influence upon the sayings and stories of the New Testament forms one of the problems set to historical study of the background of the New Testament writings. As a rule, the tendency among experts is to minimize any direct or even indirect influence of Indian folk-lore upon Christian writings till the second century. Here certainly there is none. And the same applies to the possible influence of rabbinic traditions. Whatever value they possess elsewhere, they throw no light upon a story like the feeding of the five thousand.

The historical method can, therefore, offer only two lines of suggestion for the origin and meaning of the story. (*a*) The tale arose out of the Jewish belief that messiah was expected to feed the people with bread from heaven. Once Jesus was believed to be messiah, it would be natural to tell such a story about him, especially if it was meant at the same time to illustrate the primitive love-feast or eucharist. On this view, the tale is allegorical; it is a symbolical representation of an early Christian idea and practice, one of the instances in the gospel tradition which indicate the transference of poetic tradition into prose statement. Jesus the messiah feeds his people with supernatural supplies in the wilderness, holds a eucharistic feast with them, which means fellowship and social sympathy, or originates the love-feast, which implies that all share their food in a generous and orderly fashion.

This[1] is certainly the idea in the mind of the fourth evangelist (John vi. 1–14), who uses the story to introduce a dialogue upon the true bread or manna from heaven—his equivalent for the eucharist. But it is not easy to detect the symbolism in the synoptic tradition. The love-feast or eucharist was commonly celebrated indoors, and actions like the blessing, the breaking of the bread, and the sharing of food, were characteristic of

[1] Though the tale has been elaborated realistically and developed at the same time supernaturally. The fourth gospel's account is the climax of what had already begun in Mark's story, where "the element of wonder is taking the upper hand of that of social sympathy" (Menzies, *The Earliest Gospel*, p. 145).

Jewish meals in general. The story may be ætiological, but the indications of this are not self-evident.

Those who are dissatisfied with such an explanation may argue that the story is like that of the cursing of the fig-tree, a parable or comparison which has been turned into a tale; Jesus compared his teaching to food which satisfied all, however numerous they might be, and which increased instead of diminishing when it was freely imparted by himself and his disciples. This teaching was intended to illustrate the mission from which the disciples had just returned. He bade them never hesitate to communicate what they knew of him to others. If they imparted his truth in faith, they would be able, thanks to his provision, to supply the needs of all and sundry.

Such explanations of the genesis of the story do not require to assume any basis of fact whatever, or, at the most, a bare incident, which was afterwards elaborated into a symbol. The second line of interpretation holds more closely to the ground of fact. It assumes (*b*) that the story has grown out of an incident which really occurred. Jesus once set the example of sharing his scanty food with a number of hungry hearers, and the disciples were encouraged to do the same, till it was found that there was actually enough and more than enough for all. The tale grew in oral tradition; its form was influenced by the Old Testament story of Elisha, and naturally the numbers were exaggerated. "To count is a modern practice; the ancient

method was to guess; and when numbers are guessed, they are always magnified."[1] A nucleus of fact may, therefore, still be recognized and admitted. We get the pleasant picture, as Wellhausen says, of a fine spring evening, "and a lonely spot beside the lake, with a crowd lying in groups on the grass and the disciples moving among them and distributing bread and fish. The point of the story is that Jesus does not merely dismiss the people with sermons, but also looks after the needs of their bodies, convinced that the store brought for him and his disciples will also suffice for his unbidden guests."

On either hypothesis, it is such a spiritual significance which is the contribution of the story. That Jesus was equal to any emergency, that he never was baffled, that his instincts were generous and practical, and that he frequently reassured his disciples when they hesitated—such are the primary elements in the tale, whatever view be taken of its origin. The problem is simply whether such elements do not account for the origin of the story altogether, or at any rate for the form in which it is extant.[2] The Oriental tendency to convey truth in the form of tales (see above, p. 90) was at work upon the gospel tradition in its pre-literary phase; that is highly probable. Ideal situations might be

[1] Dr. Johnson, in *A Tour to the Western Isles of Scotland.*

[2] A good statement is given by Keim in his *Jesus of Nazara*, iv. pp. 192–200. Keim's book is handicapped by its uncritical preference for Matthew's gospel, but it remains the most adequate critical biography of Jesus in any language, for its combination of religious insight and critical penetration.

created in order to convey religious ideas, and the creation sometimes involved the heightening of what had originally been a natural occurrence, or the translation of metaphor into statements of fact, or the influence of Old Testament stories upon the composition of evangelic records about Jesus.

In either case, whichever line we choose to take, the story proves that at an early period the tendency to ascribe "miracles" to Jesus was operative. This is what might be expected, from the analogous phenomena of religion; such phenomena are ascribed to great personalities like Francis of Assisi or Thomas à Becket at a very short period after their death. The fact that a story like that of the miraculous feeding of the crowd belongs to the primitive Galilean tradition is no argument against the hypothesis that it represents some historical incident embroidered with supernatural colouring; the latter process did not require any great length of time. In the first century or in the mediæval period a few years often see the growth of "supernatural" prodigies upon the soil of historical tradition about some man of God. The incident of the feeding of the five thousand seems to illustrate this process of heightening reverence in the earliest tradition about the cause of Jesus, and at the same time to suggest that Old Testament reminiscences enter into the process occasionally, even although it is now recognized to be impossible to view the gospel tradition as a merely mythical elaboration of such material.

II

Take again a passage of remonstrance and appeal from the epistles like this :—

"Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not; for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless, what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son; for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free. Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."[1]

What does the ordinary reader or hearer make of this trenchant passage in our authorized version of Galatians? Does he realize how trenchant it is? It is a vigorous plea against reaction in religion, against any relapse into traditional and national forms which compromise the native freedom of the Christian religion. But to feel the impact of its message, we require to handle it at close quarters, which means, in the first place, to restore the original

[1] Gal. iv. 21–v. 1.

text. For example, the words *Jerusalem which is above is the mother of us all* are misleading. The word *all* is a Catholic insertion, which blunts the whole point of the apostle. He meant, " Jerusalem is our mother, not yours " ; he is denying the claim of the agitators who came from the earthly Jerusalem to a monopoly of God. These rigid Jewish Christians held that only people who joined Judaism by circumcision and by observing the Jewish law had any right to a place among God's people. Paul insists that the heavenly Jerusalem or divine community is peopled by Christians who care nothing for Jewish ritual ; this divine community is a free state, unlike the earthly Jerusalem community which is in political bondage to the Roman Empire and the Law. It is curious that even so acute and advanced a critic as Jowett passed this point by in his edition. But it is vital to the argument. It also indicates, by the way, the kind of real service which textual criticism often renders to the interpretation of the New Testament by brushing off dogmatic accretions.

Correcting this and one or two other minor items, we must re-translate the paragraph, in order to make it intelligible. It runs thus :

Tell me, you who are keen to be under the Law, will you not listen to the Law ? That is, " listen to this lesson which I will give you from the life of Abraham in the Jewish law-book." It occurred to Paul that the most effective argument and answer would be that of the Bible itself, " as if words out of the Law must be better rhetoric to them than any that

he could employ " by himself. By " Law," which is a necessary but misleading term, he means the Old Testament order of religion as an order and also as embodied in the Pentateuch. These Christians in Galatia were inclined to agree with the religious mission from Jerusalem that it would be safer for them to fall into line with the traditional ritual discipline of God's people, instead of merely practising the spiritual faith taught by their apostle. The mission had evidently suggested that such a spiritual faith required to be safeguarded and supplemented by the due observance of Jewish rites and festivals. Paul's contention is that such a change spelt deterioration, not advance. He meets his audience on the ground of their " Law," and proceeds adroitly to tell them a story with a moral. *Surely it is written in the Law that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave-woman and one by the free-woman; but while the son of the slave-woman was born by the flesh, the son of the free-woman was born by the promise. Now this is an allegory.* That is, he reads a subtle, religious sense into the literal story of Genesis. That legend describes how Abraham had a son born to him in the ordinary course of nature by his slave-girl Hagar, and then a legitimate son born by his wife Sarah in fulfilment of a special divine promise. The legend was based on racial jealousy; it was originally current in order to prove that the nomadic Arabians or Ishmaelites were descended from an inferior branch of the Hebrews, i.e. from the Hagarenes. Paul uses it to prove that the Jews were not, as they claimed to be, the real sons

of Abraham, but that Christians were; it was the Jews who were the inferior branch. Natural descent from Abraham was no valid title to privilege, and no proof of legitimacy; even Abraham expelled one of his natural sons from the household, and this was an anticipation of God's method in preferring Christians to Jews. Ishmael typifies the Jews, Isaac the Christians. The method of proof was not new. Philo had already used the very same texts in an equally allegorical passage to prove that Sarah's children, representing true wisdom, were superior to Hagar's children as the representatives of mere worldly knowledge—in other words, to prove the thesis that sophistry must be ejected from the soul in order to make room for true virtue: Sarah, or the Jewish Law, was superior to Hagar, or pagan philosophy. It was a semi-rabbinic method of proof, which had its own effectiveness in that age. We must keep that in mind, and at the same time recollect that (i) the passage is really "neither an illustration nor an argument, but an interpretation of Old Testament Scripture" (Jowett) on lines which, as we have seen (pp. 81 f), contemporaries were accustomed to follow, and (ii) that it is adduced as a proof for what was already a *fait accompli* in Christian experience (see above, pp. 98 f). Holding these considerations before us, we can now see what the apostle is trying to do. He argues, *the women are two covenants. One comes from Mount Sinai, bearing children for servitude; that is Hagar, for Mount Sinai is away in Arabia,* i.e. in the country of the Edomites, at a distance from the land of

freedom and promise. This is not a mere geographical remark, it is pregnant with meaning ; the Sinaitic Law and Covenant was not given within the land of promise, but far away, in the Arabian desert. So that although distant from Jerusalem, this *corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for the latter is in servitude with her children. But the Jerusalem on high is free, and she is " our " mother. For it is written :*

Rejoice, O thou barren who bearest not,
Break into joy, thou who travailest not ;
For the children of the desolate woman are far more than of the married.

This is a quotation from the Greek version of the Old Testament, which the apostle makes for his own purposes. It is literally the optimistic cry of a prophet after the exile, who looks forward to Jerusalem being larger than ever ; paradoxically she is to have a more numerous population now than she had in the earlier happy days of her previous union with Yahweh. Paul makes the two women of the metaphor refer to different persons, to Hagar and to Sarah, typifying Judaism and Christianity. With brilliant insight he foresees the day when the Christian Church will outnumber Judaism. He assumes that the children share the lot of the slave-mother and not of the father, which is Greek and Roman, rather than Semitic. But that is a minor matter. Then he goes on : *Now you are the children of the Promise, brothers, like Isaac ; but just as in the old days the son born by the flesh persecuted the son born by the Spirit, so it is still to-day.* That is,

he explains, the persecution of Christians by Jews is quite intelligible, once it is recognized that Jews are playing the insolent, malicious rôle of Ishmael, the inferior descendant of Abraham. Why be surprised at the domineering law and the interference of those Jewish churchmen? They are simply living up to their position, and we Christians, like Isaac, are always the injured party! But the really curious thing about this sentence is that Paul attributes to Ishmael a temper which is quite absent from the canonical legend. We look into the story of Genesis xxi. to find traces of any persecution, and we find none. On the contrary, Ishmael is described as playing along with his brother; the two children were on friendly terms. Even the Greek version suggests nothing that could serve as a basis for Paul's reading of the scene. Where, then, did he get it? The answer is, in a fanciful, Jewish haggadah, or pious homiletical expansion. The later Jewish antipathy to the Edomites led them to darken the character of Ishmael the Edomite ancestor. The Hebrew term for "playing" could be taken loosely as an equivalent for "mocking," and from this and other passages in the Old Testament the rabbis made out that Ishmael had persecuted poor little Isaac, shooting arrows at him, for example, and pretending that this was done in fun, when he really meant to injure the lad. The interesting thing is that this tradition, though apparently current in oral form by the beginning of the second century A.D., does not emerge in writing till some centuries after Paul, when it

comes out in the *Bereshith rabba*, a midrashic exposition of Genesis, which even traditionally was not composed till the third century, and only appears in a sixth-century compilation. That is, Paul here draws upon an oral Jewish tradition with which he and his contemporaries were familiar, but of which there happens to be no contemporary trace in literature. Then he continues: *However, what does the scripture say? "Put away the slave-woman and her son, for the son of the slave-woman shall not be heir along with the son of the free-woman."* The Jews are to be displaced in favour of the Christians, in God's household, for all their persecuting policy. Finally, the writer summarizes his argument: *Hence, we are children of no slave-woman, my brothers, but of the free-woman, with the freedom for which Christ set us free. Make a firm stand then, do not slip into any yoke of servitude.* For in religion, as in political life, liberty has to be carefully guarded; nothing is more easy than to lose it more or less unconsciously. There is an instinctive gravitation, on the part of the lower self, to a level upon which external rules and an outward code save us from the responsibilities of freedom, from thinking for ourselves, from the strain of living under the supreme motives of a vital insight. And the forces of reaction are never so strong as in the period immediately after an advance. Hence Paul's imperative tone.

I have gone over this passage, in order to show again how the historical method works. Here, for example, we see it (i) using textual criticism, (ii) raising the question of allegory in the interpretation

of the Bible, (iii) discovering Paul's use of rabbinic legends in argument, and finding that there may be allusions to popular beliefs in the background of the New Testament which are not obvious, and above all (iv) proving that even in handling a local, far-off situation, like the unsteady condition of these Asiatic Christians, the apostle is discussing principles and meeting issues which are of urgent and lasting importance. How permanent is the question which the controversy in the Galatian Churches brought to light! It may be true, as Hausrath argues,[1] that

> "The victory of a ritualistic religion, first in the Jewish form, then in the Byzantine, and finally in that of Islam, was from the outset only a matter of time among these tribes of Asia Minor. For them, a spiritual religion could only be a transient dream. The languid climate, the pressure of their own sensual nature, and the preponderant power of imagination among Orientals, could not fail soon to corrupt every spiritual religion. This is the reason why Paulinism took such slight root here"

Perhaps. But in any case this carries us too far from our immediate purpose. Paul may have given to these immature Christians in Galatia more than they were capable of appreciating or retaining. Yet the pamphlet which embodies his offer and appeal remains one of the classical documents of the Christian religion, and, although the historical appreciation of its immediate setting brings out the temporary and unconvincing forms in his logic, it also lets the timeless matter of the message break through.

[1] *History of New Testament Times*, iii. 199.

CHAPTER VI

THE TASK OF THE HISTORICAL METHOD

THE first task of the historical method is to indicate its right to exist; the second is to exhibit its positive aims. The second largely enters into the first, of course. But each requires a separate word.

I

In the department of New Testament study, as elsewhere, the historical method has to maintain its rights over and again. Mainly against two encroaching theories. One is, that the function of historical research is to provide evidence for foregone dogmatic conclusions. This would mean the very death of the historical spirit in the study of the New Testament. Historical investigation is rehabilitating more of tradition here as elsewhere than used to be thought likely; but this is its effect, not its aim. It is legitimate to argue that the New Testament cannot be properly understood or employed apart from the common life of the Christian Church, that it is always relative to a larger Christian experience which has persisted through the centuries, and that it ought not to be taken for what it never

was, viz. a dogmatic quarry or an ecclesiastical draft or an ethical programme. But it is illegitimate to go further and subordinate it as an inspired collection to an inspired authority enshrined in some Church tradition. This is to impose a restriction upon the historical method as well as upon the religious mind, which still requires to be denied. Dogma has no right to take advantage of the modesty which is characteristic of true historical research.

We shall return to this point in a moment. Meantime, we observe that the other foe is the a priori abstract method, which develops an idea of Christianity out of special considerations, till it really matters little or nothing what has happened in history. Such a theory assumes many forms. Sometimes it is a mystical evaporation of the historical; sometimes it is the reduction of Christianity to a set of truths accessible to the natural reason, or of so-called eternal truths which are not to be culled from any line of historical development or indeed from any historical religion at all. We get a rationalist expression of the latter notion in Lessing. The eighteenth-century philosophers had small use for history. In the sixteenth century the appeal to antiquity had roused a vivid interest in the historical sources of Christianity. But, as we have already hinted (pp. 14 f), this interest had been predominantly practical, in the sense that it furnished driving power for the new formation of Christian thought and practice. Once the latter seemed secure, the interest in history, which had

really been subsidiary and secondary, died away in many circles. An era of Protestant scholasticism followed, in the seventeenth century, and it was against this reaction that two protests were levelled (i) by mysticism, and (ii) by the forces of philosophical and religious speculation, which during the earlier part of the eighteenth century swung over to an insistence upon nature and reason, corresponding in some respects to the religious philosophy of the apologists in the second century.

(i) Whenever scholasticism narrows and isolates the New Testament, the instant protest is heard, that the God who spoke then speaks now to human faith and need. There is an instinctive reaction against the dogmatic idea that revelation is confined to the letter of the New Testament. Thus, the first mystics of the reformed Church, men like Sebastian Frank and Valentine Weigel, anticipate the teaching which George Fox and the Quakers of the English seventeenth century felt obliged to put forward against the extravagant biblicism of the Puritan theologians. They appeal to the witness of the Spirit, to the inner light. They reject the superstitious view of the Bible as a set of oracles, and maintain the living counsel and guidance of God. The theory is often better in its protest than in its positive statement. Some of these mystics exaggerate the inner light, till it becomes an uncontrolled individualism. They claim to have revelations which supersede or supplant or revise the Scriptures. They will compare the revelation of Christ in the Bible to the swaddling-clothes which

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wrapped the infant Jesus, and argue that intuition alone sees him in his true and full being. In more sober forms, especially of modern quietism, the relative value of the New Testament is recognized. Mysticism, according to the temperament of its representatives, can either ignore or employ external aids like the New Testament[1] or the sacraments. But it is beset by the temptation to minimize the historical—to ignore the combination reflected in the most mystical pamphlet of the New Testament, which declares, *We know what love is by this, that he laid down his life for us. . . . This is how the love of God has appeared for us, by God sending his only Son into the world, so that by him we might live.*[2] The historical element has to be spiritually understood and appropriated, but not sublimated out of existence. The historical method insists upon this, in its own way, as it has always done, particularly against extreme claims made by the idea of the "Inner Light," which dominates some forms of mysticism. The latter is occasionally valid and valuable against the rationalist idea, as well as against some unduly historical or rigidly external presentation of the New Testament, but its challenge to the historical method has, for the sake of reality, for the sake of self-protection against the doctrinaire or the fanatic, to be countered. It is a kind service to warn the impatient mystic against trying a short-

[1] The relation of the earlier and mediæval mystics to the Bible is sketched by C. Dombre in "Les Mystiques et la Bible" (*Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie*, 1920, pp. 44–72)

[2] 1 John iii. 16, iv. 9.

cut to religious reality which is really a *cul-de-sac*.

Another expression of the same tendency is the effort to retain some isolated ideas of the New Testament and at the same time to ignore this context. Is it not possible to detach and practise the great ethical principles of the New Testament, apart from the history and theology? This is a question which is seriously asked, and answered by some in the affirmative. For example, in 1893 the younger Dumas wrote a letter to the *Gaulois* upon what he believed to be the coming interest in the soul, which would make for social health and happiness amid the materialism and militarism of civilization.

> "I do not know," he wrote, "whether it is because I am to leave this earth before long and rays already reaching me from under the horizon have affected my vision, but I believe our world is on the point of beginning to realize the words, 'Love one another,' without caring, however, whether they were spoken by man or God."

But it does matter who spoke words like these, and why. Christian love may be defined as devotion to the ends of God in human personality. This involves a care for everything that furthers the divine aim in other people, as well as in oneself; it is a prohibition of cynicism or selfishness, and an incentive to remove any social condition like slavery or class-feeling which depresses the human soul or handicaps the development of a full personal life. It throbs with a reaction against vice, misery, cruelty, and oppression. It is at issue with any social order which makes the goodness of one class depend upon

conditions that render life and goodness an unfair struggle for other people. While this may operate as a Christian principle, however, its driving power lies in the original context, which deduces it from the love of God to man as exhibited in the vocation of Jesus Christ. The historical method warns us that this is the root of the idea, and suggests that to regard it as a mere intuition will in the long run be equivalent to making it a cut flower, not a living plant. The story of comparative religion, for example, indicates that the historical element is a note of all the higher faiths, and that wherever, as in the case of Hinduism, the sense of history is weak, there is a danger of the idea of human personality becoming vague.

(ii) The cognate danger is equally prevalent, though in a different form and phase. "How can knowledge of the eternal inter-relations of things be founded upon particular historical facts? How can I be expected to transform all my ideas for the sake of certain events which happened eighteen centuries ago?" So Lessing asked. But what were his "ideas"? He assumed that the eternal truths of reason and nature must be unmediated, and that he possessed valid propositions about the world which were independent of observation or historical basis. It is an assumption which may be fairly challenged. "Contingent truths of history can never prove eternal truths of reason." Perhaps not, if the standard of proof is correspondence with an assumed system of knowledge, or if Christianity is a system of idealist principles, whose relation to history is merely temporary and accidental.

If history simply offers illustrations and examples of moral truth, then it is possible to agree with Kant, as with Lessing before him, that the historical element is not essential to religious faith. "It is superstition to say that belief in historical facts is a duty, and necessary to salvation." "Historical truths, which are contingent, can never become proofs of the truths of reason, which are necessary." An argument of this kind invalidates the historical method, by assuming that the absolute reason is the source of the moral ideal, and that only the human reason is required in order to apprehend the latter. Consequently, history ceases to have real value; any evolution in it is that of an abstract principle for which there is no essential connexion with events and facts, or even with personalities. In an age indifferent to historical research, or among circles in which the processes of historical research have induced a temporary scepticism, in despair of reaching any definite position in the study of the past, such an attitude is intelligible. It marks in philosophy, as it does in some phases of religion, a desperate attempt to escape from the uncertainty and relativity of history, into a region where absolute truth is attainable. But it is none the less to be rejected, even when it comes forward as an ally to Christianity. When Strauss issued his *Life of Jesus*, in 1835, he declared that the essence of the Christian religion was quite independent of his drastic criticism of the gospels. "The supernatural birth of Christ, his miracles, his resurrection and ascension, remain eternal truths, whatever doubts may be cast on

their reality as historical facts." This sort of language amazes us. But it was quite sincere from Strauss. The Christian religion was for him a representation of eternal truths, of which the gospel story was little more than a metaphysical allegory. He could view with dispassionate calmness the evaporation of the historical tradition of Jesus, since the essential truth of Christianity remained inviolate. What did it matter about the content of the historical symbol, so long as the vital, permanent idea lived and moved serenely in the sphere of higher categories embracing the development of humanity, categories of the Infinite and the Absolute, with which no individual in history, not even Christ, had any organic connexion?

Such a position is at best a makeshift; neither historical science nor faith can accept it as a final position.

"Apart from the biographical legend which it contains," said Prosper Mérimée once, "the New Testament differs from all ancient works in the admirable morals which it teaches, represented in practical form and addressed to every one. It is an epitome of the finest principles, which formerly had been reserved by Greek philosophers for a small number of adepts, but which are now put within reach of all men without exception. It seems clear to me that there is no better rule of conduct to follow, whatever doubts one may entertain about the origin of the book."

It is difficult to be sure that Mérimée was quite serious and sincere in this estimate. But, apart from the personal question, we may be sure that it is doubtful praise to laud the New Testament as an epitome of superb principles which happens to be encrusted with historical legends. In epochs when

historical scepticism blows hard, men may take refuge from the storm in such estimates, as natures like T. H. Green and Clough did in last century, falling back upon the hope that, however the historical element might collapse under inquiry, the essential principles of New Testament Christianity would survive. But this despairing view of historical research is no longer necessary. The mood voiced by Mérimée and others, including Modernists who tend to regard religious interpretation as independent of facts, is merely a temporary estimate, induced by historical agnosticism. It is scientifically untenable. Days may come when the apparent uncertainty of historical evidence and of human testimony as a means of attaining demonstrative certainty about the past may drive men to interest themselves in the ideas rather than in the events of the New Testament, as if the practical efficacy of the former were a sufficient proof of their validity; but faith will never allow that the Christian values are charged with a vital significance which is absolutely independent of facts, and the historical method is equally resolute to maintain that its sceptical element does not affect the conviction that from the first the Christian interpretation of faith was organically connected with some nexus of events.

II

The historical method aims at a solution, which is much less easy and much more adequate. It starts frankly from the postulate that the historical acts and facts which are integral to Christianity

are recorded in the New Testament for the sake of faith, to produce or to confirm a religious conviction. Thus—to take a single instance—Paul writes to the Corinthian church[1] that the Christian message is *Christ the crucified*. That is history. Jesus was put to death upon the cross; he suffered the death penalty under Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem. This, the apostle continues, *is a stumbling-block to the Jews and "sheer folly" to non-Jews, but for those who are called, whether Jews or Greeks, a Christ who is the power of God and the wisdom of God*. That is experience or faith, a judgment of the historical fact which depends upon an emotion and intelligence outside the immediate province of history. It is from this point of view that the historical narratives in the New Testament have been written. What does such an estimate imply for the valuation of their contents?

Well, to begin with, we must observe three things. (*a*) The mere fact that history is recorded for a purpose does not necessarily invalidate the record. Ancient history was practically all written for a purpose; even Tacitus had his anti-imperialistic bias, and always wrote of the past with a distinct idea of producing an impression upon his readers in the present. (*b*) The New Testament writers assume that the historical facts occurred in order to produce faith. In recording them for the purpose of raising belief in the God of Jesus, these writers are conscious of carrying out the original object of the historical movement. They are not making

[1] 1 Cor. i. 23.

out of history something that was not there already. Such, at least, is their conviction. It may be correct or not; that remains to be proved. Even if it is shown to be correct in principle, it may not always take forms that still commend themselves to a modern judgment. But it is a consideration which has to be weighed in the scales. (*c*) The internal evidence of the gospels supplies an incidental reason for their substantial trustworthiness. Over and again, in the gospels, we have Jesus upbraiding his disciples for a failure to understand him. They mistake his meaning at some of the most vital points. He constantly urges them to grasp the inward sense of his message. These facts are honestly set down, the difficulty he felt of communicating his ideas even to his own circle of adherents, and the retarding influence of conventional views and prejudices upon their minds. Yet his most characteristic sayings were remembered. There must have been, among his followers, those who had an ear for sayings which were above their heads. Like the Old Testament prophets, Jesus had followers who handed down his teaching, even when it rebuked their practices and told against their earlier opinions. And this was due to much more than the retentiveness of an Oriental memory. There was a deeper instinct at work in the preservation of the tradition amid the Palestinian circles of the early Church. Large sections of his teaching must have perished; we possess only a fragmentary record of his career. But the salient features were preserved, and preserved with remarkable fidelity. No doubt the

paradoxical, sharply cut, original sayings of Jesus would cling to the memory; even when they were hard sayings, hard to understand and harder to practise, they would be recollected by those who had heard them or heard of them. Yet the fact of their preservation indicates that the inner circle whom Jesus taught had capacities which were not dulled by their occasional failure at first to enter into the meaning of his instructions. The gospels suggest two reasons. (i) One is, that the resurrection enabled the disciples to understand better what Jesus had been and what he had said about himself. (ii) The other is, that their recollections of him were inspired: the Fourth gospel[1] makes him assure his disciples that when the Spirit of truth came to them after the resurrection, it would draw upon what belonged to Jesus and disclose this to them, i.e. enable them to understand the meaning and purpose of Jesus himself.

What the reader or critic to-day has to do, all over the historical field, is to estimate this element of interpretation, by judging whether the historian has allowed partisan bias or love of effect to interfere with his presentation of the past. In the case of the New Testament this is specially difficult, for we are practically dependent upon the writings for our knowledge of the facts; the historical statement can rarely be checked by outside authorities, except in the case of some details. Nevertheless, it is imperative to make the attempt. The method is legitimate, though it is equally legitimate for us to

[1] John xvi. 14.

test it, as far as we can, to read not only the facts in the light of the thesis, but the thesis in the light of the facts—in the light, at least, of what we may conjecture to have been the facts.

It is impossible to accept without qualification Mr. Balfour's thesis that "what has in the main caused history to be written, and when written to be eagerly read, is neither its scientific value nor its practical utility, but its æsthetic interest."[1] Thucydides certainly wrote for a definite purpose, to forewarn his readers in Greece; he desired his work to prove useful to "inquirers who want an exact knowledge of the past as an aid to the interpretation of the future, which in the cause of human things is bound to resemble, if it does not reflect, the past." Both Livy and Tacitus—at least in the *Germania*—write history with the more or less avowed purpose of holding up the simple life to their blasé, artificial contemporaries. I do not deny that they are artists; Thucydides was a subtle deliberate artist, and never more so than when he posed as a matter-of-fact recorder. But utility was their chief motive in composing their histories. At the same time Mr. Balfour is right in arguing that "Except when we happen to have been ourselves spectators of important events, there is always an artist to be reckoned with," who is responsible for emphasis, colour, and selection.

Now, what holds true of ancient history as a whole holds true of the New Testament history in the gospels and in the book of Acts. The facts are

[1] A. J. Balfour, *Theism and Humanism*, p. 82.

facts for us *plus* the personal equation of the interpreter, and a certain allowance has to be made for his "subjective" element or intuitions. "Subjective" is not a synonym for unreal or illusory. It means that the writer is fusing his personality with his interpretation, his convictions with his record. This he cannot help doing, whether he is an ancient or a modern historian. The writers of the gospels, for example, transmit historical traditions of varying probability about Jesus, but always with a certain *plus* of preaching. It is through their catechetical and apologetic interests that the facts are passed. This differentiates them from the rôle of mere chroniclers, who disavow any interest in matters of origin and purpose as they compile their annals. Aristotle startles us in his treatise upon poetry (chap. ix.) by asserting that dramatic poetry is superior to history, on the ground that poetry takes account of the higher, universal truths of life, whereas history is occupied with particular details. Poetry, says Aristotle, in effect, depicts human character as it must develop, and moves in the region of what is permanent, transforming facts into truths, while history merely narrates this and that. Such a verdict means that Aristotle did not distinguish the chronicler from the historian, and that he denied to the latter the very power of synthetical construction and interpretation which we regard to-day as his essential quality. He must do more than register, he must select and arrange his facts; he must view them in the light of a certain philosophy or process. For the actions which he

is recording stir his interest and at the same time his æsthetic or artistic purpose, which is subjective, as any sketch or description is subjective, because it represents what the artist or author sees—what in many cases he is the first to see, and what he wishes others to see as well.

> "What we have loved,
> Others will love, and we will teach them how."

Considerations like this apply to those who use the historical method. The real difference between historical students is not that one exercises his judgment and another refrains from introducing any personal equation, but that the one exercises his judgment well and the other badly. You cannot avoid the risks of interpretation by refusing to interpret at all. The only way is to test your interpretation by an ever closer study of the relevant facts and by a willingness to reconsider your position or to revise your estimate in view of fresh discoveries. You are not necessarily the better, but neither are you necessarily the worse, for believing in the religion whose history you are studying. What we have to do, in going down to the difficult field of investigation, is above all things to allow the various aspects to tell upon our judgment, to avoid impressionism, and to honour our faith too highly to make any sacrifice of truth at its altars.

As for the material presented in the historical narratives of the New Testament, the fair application of the historical method, sifting and criticizing the data as stringently as possible, yields sufficient trustworthy tradition for the purposes of a Christian

faith. To investigate historically the rise of the Christian religion, in the personality and work of Jesus, is to encounter a problem whose elements are far more complicated and serious than in the case either of Buddhism or of Zoroastrianism. In one sense the historian knows more about the origin of Christianity than about the rise of any other ancient religion ; the available documents are close to the facts in time. But in another sense the gospels set a problem of much more severity. *Hélas !* said Scherer, *on ne fait pas impunément de l'exégèse.* That is true in more ways than one. Exegesis may lead to conclusions which disturb the naïve faith of the inquirer. But exegesis also forces upon him the need of faith—at least the sense that he is dealing here with questions of personality and truth which open up ultimate issues. Gone or going are the days when it could be assumed that the primitive Christianity started as a hero-worship of Jesus. Gone also are the days when " all history or all myth " could be put forward as the alternative in criticizing the gospel tradition, or when it was imagined that there never was any Jesus at all, but that a sudden movement of monistic pantheism expressed itself symbolically in terms of a historical career. Exegesis corrects itself ; historical criticism is full of abandoned explanations, revised judgments, and dead hypotheses, but so is any branch of science. It operates upon its own diseases, and nowadays the science has recovered from some of its childish complaints. It is not possible any longer to remain satisfied with solutions which deny

that Jesus had any messianic consciousness at all, and that this is no more than the later reflection of his disciples, who interpreted or misinterpreted his life in terms of a Jewish category with which he personally had no connexion. Nor, I think, will exegesis allow us to treat any gospel as a *roman à thèse*, written to express a preconceived idea. Neither can we separate the synoptic gospels sharply from the fourth gospel, and handle, for example, the famous saying [1] about the Son knowing the Father and the Father the Son as an erratic block from the Johannine soil. There is so much loose talk nowadays about the Fatherhood of God in the New Testament that it needs to be reiterated that the specific idea is, God the Father of Jesus, not God the Father of men. Historically the relation of the Son to the Father is primary. It was with a sure critical insight that Matthew Arnold [2] declined to accept the easy solution that sayings like that to which I have just referred were later insertions. In spite of some current theories about the later origin of this particular saying, which betray violent oscillations of critical opinion, I must confess that the spirit of it seems consonant with that consciousness of authority in Jesus which is one of the most characteristic features in the gospel story. His was more than a prophet's authority. He speaks not only in God's name but in his own, with a faith in himself as the founder of the divine kingdom, and with a claim on others for such a faith. It is impossible to miss now and

[1] Matt. xi. 27 = Luke x. 22. [2] *God and the Bible*, ch. vi.

again in his teaching the sense of his divine Sonship as fundamental and of his mission as final; the past revelations of God culminate in him, and his vocation is to be the crucial test, the decisive opportunity, for men. This is expressed not only in his words but in his life, in his sufferings and death as a sacrifice. Both reveal not only a final purpose of God, but one of which he himself was conscious, as Son of God. This is a conclusion which will stand the weather. Upon the whole, recent research corroborates the view that the consciousness of a distinct relation to God the Father is fundamental in the New Testament conception of Jesus Christ. The truth is, as Troeltsch admits, that the only alternatives open to us are

"either to assume that it was a religious hallucination or to recognize in it an actual, creative, and unique relationship to God, an influx from the supra-sensual world which eludes our scrutiny as it envelops itself in the forms of Jewish messianism. This is not an artificial alternative, pointed as an apologetic pistol at the breast of the historian; it is no mere device of theologians, who in that case, as one of our most recent scientists argued, would only be intelligible to the most subtle of psychological epicures; no, it contains a problem for one and all, a problem which must be faced by every one who has been touched at all by the power of the religious life that issues from Jesus."[1]

Such is the problem raised by the historical method. The statement of it involves a choice between two theories fundamentally. One is that (*a*) in the first century there was a diffused spiritual yearning for communion with God, for redemption from the world, and for the assurance of eternal life, which is to be traced in Oriental mythology

[1] *Gesammelte Schriften*, ii. p. 323.

and in the mystery religions, and which had to some extent already permeated the later Judaism. Into the soil of this syncretism, the original faith of the disciples fell, and from contact with the germs in this fruitful soil there developed the christology of the New Testament as we have it. To Jesus the primitive Christians gratefully transferred the yearnings and hopes of their souls, as already stirred by this widespread Oriental movement of religion. The other theory is (*b*) that the christology of the New Testament is the instinctive attempt of the disciples to express and appreciate the divine significance of their Lord, stating his person and work in terms of the categories at their disposal; that it originates in the direct impression made by him upon their hearts and minds, before and after the resurrection.

The former class of hypotheses has been put in a moderate shape by a critic like Gunkel, who argues that this syncretism affects only the form, not the fact, of the resurrection, and allows for the extraordinary impression made by Jesus upon his followers, but nevertheless insists that there was a pre-Christian christology, reflected within Judaism itself as early as the rise of the Servant of Yahweh conception (see above, pp. 93 f), which, by its stress on the suffering and rising divine being, moulded the gospel stories of the resurrection as well as the Pauline theology. This means that a supposed myth of some suffering, dying, and rising redeemer of the world is sufficient to account for the origin, or at least for the interpretation, of

Christianity in the first century. Most of those who have adopted this view with any seriousness and judgment have abandoned the hypothesis that it explains or explains away the historical Jesus. Primitive Christianity did not arise out of a spontaneous recrudescence of this world myth in Palestine any more than out of a sudden movement among the proletariat; neither the mythical nor the sociological hypothesis holds water. So much is fairly clear. But even when the question is confined to the interpretation of Christian reflection upon the historical Jesus, the answer of this hypothesis breaks down. Whatever may be thought of the possibility that some ideas of the mysteries affected the Pauline re-statement of Christianity, they do not yield material for the explanation of the genesis of the Christian tradition. In point of fact, these mystery religions, about which after all our knowledge for the first century is rather meagre, were an expression of a large religious movement which affected them and Christianity as well. It is amateurish to resolve Christianity into a mystery cult, ignoring its distinctive features and underestimating the new notes which were not drowned by the sound of outside voices. Historically, it is as impossible to deny the influence of this wide religious movement upon later Christian mysticism and sacraments as to identify early Christianity with any mystery cult, much less to account for the reverence paid to Jesus as Lord by similar phenomena in contemporary modes of pagan worship. It is not too severe a verdict to say that such attempts

to reconstruct the rise of primitive Christianity as a synthesis upon some elementary belief in Jesus, which passed through an abrupt transition from the faith of a messianic group in Judaism to the creed and ritual of a mystery religion upon the lines of some contemporary Hellenistic syncretism, deserve what Jouffroy once said about the philosophies of history which Bossuet, Vico, and Herder put forward, "the facts bend like grass below their feet; facts, in their powerful grasp, take every possible form and justify with equal complacency the most diverse theories." [1]

The alternative is preferable, for all its difficulties. In the New Testament we enter a little world of men who are doing more than looking back to Jesus; they are looking up to him, revering him as well as remembering him, and revering him as divine. Technically expressed, this fact means that Christianity from the outset had a theology. Men did not draw together in the Christian Church under the impulse of admiration for a remarkable teacher of prophetic genius or for a leader of high character. They adored him as divine. They recollected his life and words, and they waited eagerly for his return from heaven to complete the work he had begun; but memory and hope alike implied an adoration of him. This they expressed in different ways. We can see in the New Testament how the

[1] "Les faits plient comme l'herbe sous leur pieds, prennent sous leurs mains hardies toutes les formes possibles, et justifient avec une égale complaisance les théories les plus opposées" (Theodore Jouffroy, *Mélanges Philosophiques*, 1834, p. 68).

expressions change and deepen. Some called him messiah or Christ, some Son of Man (a Semitic term in the later Judaism for a divine representative), some Son of God (which in various ways appealed to people of Jewish and of non-Jewish training), and some eventually thought of him under the category of the Word or Logos of God. These and other terms rise instinctively to the lips of the primitive Christian. Their exact meaning and origin are matters for historical research, but there is no doubt as to their general aim. So far as the account of Jesus in the gospels is concerned, I fully agree with Mr. Montefiore's candid and penetrating verdict. Apart altogether from special and disputed passages in the gospels, he observes:

"The messianic consciousness is enough with the messianic claim. And that this consciousness and claim are historic, that the one was really felt and the other actually put forward, cannot, I think, be contested. But if Jesus claimed to be, or if he thought he would ere long become, the predicted messiah—then, however much he gave to the old term a new meaning, he did believe that he stood, or would shortly stand, in some special relation of pre-eminence and dignity towards the Divine Father. By the grace of God, if not by his own inner worth, he was, or would become, nearer to God—perchance even he knew, or would know, more about God—than any of those who were then living or than any of the mighty dead. And if he felt like this, it was possible for him to have taken the great, the severing step—severing him, I mean, from the purest Jewish tradition—and to have not only said, 'Believe in God,' but also 'Believe in me.'" [1]

No doubt, a judgment like this requires to be balanced. To arrive at it along satisfactory lines of historical intuition, we need to treat the literary and

[1] *Hibbert Journal* (July, 1912), p. 777.

historical data with an open mind. The conceptions of Christ which emerge in the New Testament are the product of the Christian experience. *I believed, therefore did I speak.* But, while they are not abstract speculations, they represent contemporary modes of thought which may not always have been adequate to the experience they attempt to express. The correspondence between the expression and the experience may not have been exact, in every case. At least, it is hasty to assume this. Indeed there is one qualification which has to be borne in mind: the particular conception may have led to developments which were originally beyond the experience. Thus the idea of *Son of God* would suggest to a non-Jewish mind the corollary of a divine mother, as it would not to the Semitic religious imagination. Or again, the religious experience of the risen Lord may be held to have suggested the further belief in the empty tomb, just as the very definiteness of the religious conviction that Jesus lived led Luke to " materialize " the resurrection stories by asserting that Jesus actually ate with his disciples after death. In other words, we may discover that some sections of the primitive historical tradition are really more or less partial embodiments of religious convictions which sprang from the Christian experience. The historical method has, in all fairness, to allow for the possibility of the formulated belief reacting upon the materials of the experience, i.e. upon the reasons which it imagined it possessed. Such a possibility is verified, e.g., in the proof of the messianic position of Jesus drawn from the Old

Testament, to which I have already alluded. Here the conviction is certainly original. The belief in Jesus as messiah was not a deduction from any study of the Old Testament; but, once started, it reacted upon the early Christian reading of the Old Testament, and thereby on the early Christian records themselves which were largely influenced by the Old Testament. The records of the life of Jesus were drawn up by men who believed that he had risen, that he was as he had declared, messiah, that death had not checked his power over this world, that the crucifixion was not the fifth act of a tragedy. Historically we assume that this would to some extent enable them to understand what at the time had been obscure or doubtful. They had now the clue to the meaning of much that he had said and done. In the light of the resurrection, his earthly life appeared for the first time intelligible, as it had not always been even to those who stood near him at the actual moment of earlier intercourse. But there is also the possibility, with which research must frankly reckon, that they were tempted to read back into the life of Jesus their later convictions (see above, pp. 87 f). It is not to be assumed that the retrospect invariably gave them the proper focus for seeing the past exactly as it had taken place. Yet it is one thing to admit all this, and another to relapse into a mood of morbid scepticism which is unjustified by the subject. I have no time to elaborate this point. It is argued in plenty of textbooks upon the reliability of the gospel tradition, for those who still need such argument. But instead of clinching the matter with the opinion

of a professional scholar, let me quote some sentences from a literary man. Here is Rousseau's judgment, in his *Émile* (livre iv.) :

" Shall we say that the gospel story is a work of imagination ? Friend, that is not how one invents ; the facts about Socrates, which no one doubts, are not so well attested as those about Jesus Christ. At best you are only putting the difficulty away from you, without getting rid of it. It would be more incredible that four men should have agreed to manufacture this book than that there was a single man who supplied the subject-matter for it. No Jewish authors could have hit upon its tone or its morality ; the gospel has notes of reality which are so great, so striking, so absolutely inimitable, that their inventor would be a more astonishing person than their hero." [1]

An expert would have put it more cautiously ; he would not have spoken about the four evangelists as if they were four independent witnesses, for example, and nowadays he would be less dogmatic upon the trustworthiness of the historical tradition about Socrates. But all this does not affect the essential point of the passage. Rousseau, with one of the flashes of insight which have made *Émile*, in Lord Morley's phrase, " one of the seminal books " of the world, has summed up by anticipation in these words the position on which sound criticism of the gospels is steadily converging.

[1] " Dirons-nous que l'histoire de l'évangile est inventée à plaisir ? Mon ami, ce n'est pas ainsi qu'on invente ; et les faits de Socrate, dont personne ne doute, sont moins attestés que ceux de Jésus-Christ. Au fond c'est reculer la difficulté sans la détruire ; il serait plus inconcevable que quatres hommes d'accord eussent fabriqué ce livre, qu'il ne l'est qu'un seul en ait fourni le sujet. Jamais les auteurs juifs n'eussent trouvé ni ce ton, ni cette morale ; et l'évangile a des caractères de vérité, si grands, si frappants, si parfaitement inimitables, que l'inventeur en seroit plus étonnant que le héros."

CHAPTER VII

SOME OBJECTIONS TO THE HISTORICAL METHOD

THERE is still a lingering suspicion of the historical method in studying the New Testament. Dumas heads a chapter in one of his great romances with the words : " The author is obliged, against his will, to do a little history." That sentence fairly expresses the feelings of many Christian people still, when they are incited to read the New Testament in the light of the historical method ; they either decline, or if they agree, it is against their will, and they do as little as they can. We have to reckon with this temper of reluctance and disinclination. It is not wholly obscurantist. Nor is the anti-historical vein even confined to orthodox Christians. At the opposite extreme, as we have already found (pp. 148f), there are some readers who are impatient of any suggestion that the New Testament has to be studied historically ; to them it is at best an allegorical representation of ideas, which lies altogether out of the category of history. Others, again, who take a less extreme view, regard the historical element as minor and dubious. Against all such the validity of the historical method has to be stated, especially against the first-mentioned, since theirs are the most serious objections.

The objections taken to the historical method in connexion with the New Testament—or, at least, the reasons for hesitation felt by the religious mind—are mainly five. (*a*) The historical method, it is argued, takes us too far back into the remote past, and renders the New Testament a product of yesterday instead of leaving it a living book for to-day. (*b*) It is subjective and arbitrary. (*c*) It is negative and sceptical. (*d*) It presupposes a completeness in the New Testament which is unreal, and (*e*) it breaks up the unity of the New Testament.

I

The historical method does oblige us to think ourselves back into the situation of the primitive Church in the first century of its career, to reconstruct by aid of the historical imagination, working upon such sources as we possess, the genesis and growth of the Christian movement in a world that is no longer ours. We are bound to resist the temptation of modernizing. The imperative duty of the student is to enter into the minds of men who were dominated, for example, by a geocentric view of the universe which has passed, by a historical outlook which never dreamed of centuries ahead, by conceptions of the soul and the body which were due to inherited and contemporary strains of speculation, and by an attitude to the Old Testament which requires to be altered for the modern reader. One effect of all this is to produce at first an impression of distance, as though the effect were as far from us as the spell once cast by the four

letters *S.P.Q.R.* It seems to the average man a curious, remote period, which may interest professional students but which is strange to him and which he is content to leave strange. Too much has happened during the long interval. He feels it hard and even unprofitable to think himself back into a period so different from his own.

But (i) the historical method does succeed in making this world live for the modern man. It shows him how and why certain things happened, why they did not happen earlier, and how they came to assume their actual form. A welcome sense of reality is the result.

Furthermore (ii) it reveals the fact that the fundamental issues of religion are the same, yesterday and to-day. The ages differ in their expressions of them; the New Testament age had its own environment and atmosphere, and yet faith, hope, and love, brotherhood, fellowship, and service are permanent features which we can recognize across the centuries. For example, we would have less difficulty in praying with Paul than in thinking with Philo, and we are more at home in the devotional world of Bernard of Clairvaux than in the spirit which breathes from the contemporary *Niebelungen Lied.* Now the aim of the historical method is so to interpret the New Testament that it shall put us into much the same position towards Jesus as his contemporaries occupied; reading it carefully, we may come to feel that he and we are contemporaries; what we hear are not simply echoes of a dim, distant past, but voices of living people. The more historically we study the gospels,

the more vivid is this impression. "What astonishes me," said Edward Fitzgerald in one of his letters, "is Shakespeare: when I look into him it is not a Book, but People talking all round me." This is the sort of effect produced upon the modern mind by the historical method of reading the New Testament, and although it is not faith, it is the condition of a faith that is intelligent and fruitful.

The historical method, therefore, is not mere research into a remote past; one of its results is to produce the sense that the past is vital, living on in the present, and that great personalities of bygone ages reach far beyond the range of their contemporaries. Shelley anticipates, in the *Adonais*, that splendid spirits like Keats will exercise an influence after death, whenever life is stirred to its depths.

> "When lofty thought
> Lifts a young heart above its mortal lair,
> And love and life contend in it, for what
> Shall be its earthly doom, the dead live there
> And move like winds of light on dark and stormy air."

The dead live there, that is, in the vital crises of human life. Or, as the New Testament puts it, *He being dead yet speaketh*; it is not the dead hand of the past, but its beating heart, its living spirit which lasts on and is active wherever the present confronts similar issues.

We sometimes forget, and we ought often to remember, that human motives are much the same in all ages. Psychology comes in to prevent historical research from becoming a study of remote and alien creatures. The groups or classes vary, by which the

individual is influenced, yet he remains wonderfully the same in essentials. "It is more than doubtful if any varieties of human character have disappeared during the ages of which we have knowledge, or whether any new types of character have come into existence. The motives that act upon men have altered but little." [1] This holds true especially of religion. Forgiveness, prayer, and inward bliss are experiences which, for all the variety of their historical forms, change least, as the ages alter. The distance of centuries between us and the New Testament age is reduced by the essential identity of religious experience, which has lasted in a continuity of life within the Church. As we shall see in a moment, the spiritual phenomena of the inward life are much more readily seized by the imagination of to-day working sympathetically upon the New Testament than the cognate references to social ethics, for the social setting has altered so radically that the latter require very careful study if their permanent value is to be estimated. It is otherwise in the region of religious faith. Trust in God has produced many facts in the course of the centuries since Christianity began, queer facts, impressive facts, superstitious facts. But we can verify it at first hand. The Christian experience, for all its varieties, is true to itself. The study of it to-day, and better still the possession of it, imparts a gift of penetration into its original manifestations which forms an element in the historical imagination by which the past may be reconstructed. The essence

[1] C. G. Crump, *The Logic of History*, p. 49.

of the historical mind is the power of putting oneself into a different age and recognizing not simply its differences from the present, but its essential affinities with the present. So far as the New Testament is concerned, this discipline involves accuracy, patience, and breadth of mind, as well as trained knowledge. The documents often seem to take us far from our present position. But when we bring to them this inward sympathy, they disclose an order of experience which may turn out to lie not so remote after all from an outlook under modern skies. It is not extravagant indeed to say that across all differences of creed and race and century a Christian of the first century is closer to us by his faith and ours than Cæsar could be even to a Mommsen of the nineteenth century. The alterations of civilization leave the heart of vital religion untouched as nothing else. The power of instinctive sympathy is more easy for us in this respect than it was, for example, for the French Revolutionists in their passion for Plutarch's heroes—more easy and more reliable.

Psychology, in the sense of a divining power which throws insight upon the motives of men, demands that the history of the primitive Church must be treated as life, not as an abstract evolution of principles. It enables us to understand, at the same time, how the events chronicled in the New Testament were the result not only of conscious motives in those who were acting for and within the churches, but of a world-action of which they formed part and by which they were influenced. It helps to clear

up many riddles, e.g. the paradox raised by the eschatological investigations of recent years, that in the first century, as afterwards, Christians were forwarding progress just when they vigorously disbelieved in progress at all, or the equally dramatic truth that it is sometimes by illusions that the education of men is forwarded for a time and their actions inspired. Or again, in a cognate sphere, the investigations of psychology into the subconscious and the newer study of psychic phenomena are likely to throw light upon some of the so-called "miraculous" phenomena in the New Testament. The explanation of these has been aided by modern psychology. Historical criticism has proved that some are explicable on literary grounds and others by contemporary beliefs about disease and telepathy. But the rough-and-ready criteria of last century are no longer adequate. Our modern psychology suggests that the relations of soul and body are too complex to justify an ultra-sceptical attitude towards some strange phenomena in the ancient world. The Athenian poet Agathon observed that "it was probable that a number of improbable things really happened to human beings."[1] This is the attitude of thoughtful men to-day with regard to some of the "miraculous" phenomena in the New Testament. The history of religion in other spheres and the widespread application of psychological methods have made some tales about visions, cures, and control of nature less *outré* than once they seemed.

[1] Τάχ' ἄν τις εἰκὸς αὐτὸ τοῦτ' εἶναι λέγοι,
Βροτοῖσι πολλὰ τυγχάνειν οὐκ εἰκότα.

Finally, in this connexion there are phenomena in some of the mission fields of to-day which are remarkably similar to those of the first century. The study of modern missions in China, Japan, and India, for example, yields material which often throws a pencil of light upon the cognate conditions and problems of the first Christian missions as reflected in the New Testament. This is a consideration which counts. The historical student of the New Testament cannot afford to dispense with a knowledge of how Christianity to-day works and changes as it breaks new ground among people whose civilization is often as distinct from Western Christianity as was the civilization of many early converts during the first century. Present-day missions in the East especially illustrate several phases of organization, ministry, and ethical or theological development within the period covered by the New Testament writings. Gibbon used to assert that his experience in the militia helped him as a historian. "The discipline and evolution of a modern battalion gave me a clearer notion of the phalanx and the legion, and the captain of the Hampshire Grenadiers has not been useless to the historian of the Roman Empire." Critics of the New Testament may not be able to acquire a personal knowledge of missions at first hand. But they can at any rate avail themselves of the experience won by trained workers in these fields, and so equip themselves for a grasp of the primitive Church's life which is denied to those who treat it simply under the light of the reading-lamp. Much of what occurred during the New

Testament period is occurring to-day, in forms remarkably similar.[1]

II

As for the charge of subjectiveness, we must frankly admit that the historical method has often worked, more or less consciously, under the influence of some philosophical idea, and failed to criticize its own presuppositions. I say nothing here of the dogmatic prejudices which have operated and still operate on the conservative and liberal sides alike. These are much more likely to be recognized than the philosophical deflections, which are more subtle. Of the latter, the most obvious is the influence exerted by the Hegelian dialectic upon Baur's brilliant scientific treatment of early Church history (see above, p. 118). Through the opposition between the extreme Jewish Christian party and the Gentile Christian party in the primitive Church, the original spirit of the religion evolved, we are told, into the synthesis of the later Catholicism. But the characteristics of the period are too ramified and rich to be explained upon a mere antithesis between the Petrine and the Pauline parties; the New Testament documents, we now see, are not such "tendency" pamphlets as Baur imagined; and, above all, the Hegelian scheme of thesis, antithesis, and

[1] This is so vital that I take the opportunity of mentioning three books which bring it out: Dr. T. M. Lindsay's *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries* (1903), Mr. C. N. Moody's *The Mind of the Early Converts* (1920), and Mr. Godfrey E. Phillips' *The Ancient Church and Modern India* (1920).

synthesis, proves artificial, in contact with the genesis of primitive Christianity.

A further deflection due to the Hegelian dialectic is of course the inadequate place assigned by Baur to the reaction of personalities upon doctrine. For him the symmetrical evolution of the doctrinal idea was all-important. He threw a fresh and vivid light upon the genetic sequence of belief, but he failed to allow for the modifying influences of the life produced by that belief, and confined his attention unduly to the speculative development, hardly conscious that this development lies open to cross-currents which it sets up in the larger environment of society. "Baur," as Mark Pattison[1] put it, "cannot be acquitted of somewhat of scholasticism —of fixing the attention too exclusively on Christian thought and neglecting the development of Christian life and morals. These last he deduced from the doctrine, but he does not allow for their reaction on the doctrine." That is, his method implied a one-sided view of belief, due to his philosophical equipment.

Again, the recent use of the historical method by Ritschl and his followers exhibits another philosophical principle which is tacitly assumed, i.e. the idealist conception of an absolute truth or pure essence which can be attained by the human mind. For Ritschl this is, in religion, the revelation of Jesus ; in his person and teaching the final norm and content of Christianity lies. The historical criticism of the New Testament is occupied with the recovery of

[1] *Essays*, ii pp 162, 163.

this fundamental position, and with an exhibition of how, even within the New Testament itself, corruptions have already eaten their way into the pure, essential nucleus. All turns upon the historic Jesus. This may lead to an unhistorical eclecticism, as in the neo-Kantian presuppositions of Harnack's work upon the New Testament, which also discovers the quintessence of Christianity in the historical Jesus of Nazareth.

Loisy at one time presented the historical method in exactly the opposite shape, as dominated by the idea of evolution. But here again, either in a statement like his, or in one corresponding to the earlier sketch by Newman, tacit assumptions are made, which render this application of the historical method almost equally subjective. The conception of development is carried over in an obviously misleading way from organic evolution to the history of religion. The Christianity of the New Testament is a supernatural product containing in germ or in principle, according as you work by biological or logical analogies, all that has ever established itself within the catholic Church. Practically this resolves itself into a glorification of "Whatever is is right." The free exploitation of the idea of growth in the explanation of the New Testament and the Christian Church ignores the fact that, in religion as in philosophy and politics, there is a tendency to degeneration as well as to improvement, that there is such a thing as an elaborate departure from first principles as time goes on, and that logical sequence is not necessarily a mark of vital growth. The idealist

assumption is not more open to criticism than the evolutionary.

But the point is that both are subjective. For example, Troeltsch himself, in the very act of asserting the rights of the historical method in treating Christianity, falls back upon a Hegelian principle in order to avoid the need of regarding history as chaos. The very presupposition of history, he declares, is faith in a Reason which is controlling history and continuously revealing itself :

> "My view of history denies out and out the historical relativity which is the result of the historical method simply along the lines of atheism or of religious scepticism ; I annul this relativity by the conception of history as a development of the divine reason. Here lies the inalienable service rendered by the Hegelian philosophy, which simply needs to be freed from its metaphysic of the absolute, its dialectic of antitheses, and its inherently logical conception of religion."[1]

This is an act of faith, and an act of faith which involves a particular philosophical conception. Troeltsch argues that from it he can recognize in the great prophetic religion of Israel and in the person of Jesus Christ, which carries on and completes that religion, a new and decisive phase of religious faith. This may well be. It is at least as tenable a position as that of Newman or the Modernists. But in either case it must be admitted that the historical method is operating under a philosophical assumption. I shall speak of this later on, in connexion with the limitations of the historical method. Meantime it is enough to admit frankly the element of subjectiveness in any recon-

[1] *Gesammelte Schriften* (1913), ii. pp. 746, 747.

struction of primitive Christianity which employs the historical method. All that can be said is that the tendency should be noted, and that, so far as the historical method itself is concerned, it may be trusted to correct itself. Within its own sphere, the historical method is not more subjective and arbitrary than the scientific method.

III

The third objection is based upon several reasons, and an attempt to answer it brings up more than one question of importance.

(*a*) The impression that historical criticism is negative is partly due to the extravagance of some of its representatives. George Eliot remarks that Tom Tulliver liked dogs—that is to say, he liked throwing stones at them. Some critics make their readers feel that they have a similar liking for anything in the New Testament; they revel in the spirit of denial and indulge in questioning almost, it would seem, for the mere sake of questioning. Sometimes they are reacting against an overweening temper of traditionalism, which provokes them. But their captious temper does not represent the historical method. The true scepticism is merely a shield held up by belief in self-defence. When honesty is demanded from an historical student, it is sometimes assumed to mean little more than the duty of saying bluntly what he does not like, though he may be expected to like it, or of disagreeing with conventional views. In the earlier stages of research,

this negative virtue is often most necessary. The historian's duty is to put a query to any tradition that comes before him, and to uphold historical equity against any encroachment of religious prejudice. The questioning spirit has its rights. But as the study progresses the virtue of veracity enlarges its range. It covers the positive duty of accepting any elements of tradition which survive the acid tests of criticism, and of affirming such truths without heated words or scented language.

(*b*) Another source of this suspicion is the unexamined idea that the historical material of the New Testament is exempt, in virtue of its subject, from the ordinary scrutiny which analyses documents and sifts evidence from human testimony, or at any rate that its quality is equal. Such assumptions require to be challenged. There are varying levels of historical probability in the New Testament; the reliability is not always the same even in the same chapter—as may be seen, for example, in the nineteenth chapter of the book of Acts, where the story of the riot at Ephesus, which is evidently based on first-hand authority, immediately follows a popular description of Paul's powers and rivals in magical practices, in which "the writer is rather a picker-up of current gossip, like Herodotus, than a real historian."[1] Such degrees of trustworthiness need to be pointed out. It is only the uninitiated who deem criticism of this kind a sceptical diversion; in reality it is a duty to the love of truth.

[1] Sir W. M. Ramsay, *St Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*, p. 273.

In the New Testament, as elsewhere, to study history is to entertain a proper suspicion of much that goes by the name of evidence. What was evidence then is not always evidence now. The historian in his search for proof has to cross-examine documents and data; he cannot accept them at their face value. Documents may turn out to be more or less unreliable for various reasons. A book may not be by its reputed author. Or, it may be interpolated in such a way as to demand caution before we can use it as a source. Again, we have to distinguish, even in a book which may be generally trustworthy, between what the author can vouch for as an eye-witness and what he has only secured from other people. The entire method of deduction comes into play, for we only know historical facts from their traces and effects, and the science of analysing these, of working back to their causes, and of sifting traditions and testimonies, is an extremely complex and delicate procedure. Caution is one of the first duties in our method. The man who doubts a statement is not necessarily a wise man, but no one will ever become wise unless he learns to doubt what he is told about the past as about the present, unless he refuses to accept implicitly what is put before him as proof. It is a lesson we learn in the practice of ordinary life no less than in the study of history. But the past sometimes imposes upon us just because it is so far away. When we find a statement in an old book, especially in a religious book like the New Testament, we may feel a sort of shame in doubting it. We are reluctant

to question its truth. And yet we must, to begin with. The more confident a statement is, the more definite a tradition, all the more imperative it is to recollect the possibilities of error which may have affected the writer, and which no amount of sincerity or of devotional aim can invariably check. The progress of historical research in New Testament study itself has been marked by queries of accepted statements, by a wise scepticism, by the qualifying of strong assertions. Few things have hindered the truth so much as the uncritical disposition to take documents as equally valid, without discriminating between them or between different strata in their contents. This may sound disconcerting and unwelcome. But it is a necessary preliminary to accurate knowledge of the period. And as an offset we may bear in mind these further considerations. (i) An obstinate distrust is as misleading as a blind credulity, in dealing with historical evidence. One result of this negative research has been to establish the authenticity of some documents which were formerly under suspicion, and to increase the probability of certain traditions. (ii) There is a false insecurity as well as a false security; some things are much more certain in primitive Christianity than many people nowadays appear to realize. The stream of incessant and penetrating criticism has not left everything tentative, precarious, and unreliable. Positive gains have been won, and confirmation of certain literary and historical traditions has gradually emerged, just as the less trustworthy strata have been laid bare.

(*c*) There is a further source of suspicion which requires to be analysed, because it is often an unsuspected cause of misjudgment about the historical method. Ultimately it goes back to an imperfect idea of what is meant by "historical." For example, history has been often made by beliefs that did not correspond to the actual facts, and one of the most powerful forces in the world has been not objective history but coloured tradition, some more or less ideal version of what is held to have occurred. Any one knows this who has dipped into the study of history. It is a general principle of the science. But it is one thing to grant it, another thing to apply it to the historical problem of primitive Christianity. One of the first to do so was Baur, who frankly began his history of the Church [1] by defining the limits of his method.

"The question as to the nature and the reality of the resurrection lies outside the sphere of historical inquiry. History must be content with the simple fact, that in the faith of the disciples the resurrection of Jesus came to be regarded as a solid and unquestionable fact. It was in this faith that Christianity acquired a firm basis for its historical development. What history requires as the necessary antecedent of all that is to follow, is not so much the fact of the resurrection of Jesus, as the belief that it was a fact."

This, says Lord Acton, is "the most characteristic passage ever written by a German historian." Lord Acton, I suppose, was thinking of the principle that doctrines develop out of ideas rather than out of events—the Hegelian assumption which underlay

[1] *The Church History of the First Three Centuries* (Eng. tr.), i. p. 42.

Baur's treatment of history. But, while in this particular case the belief must have had some basis of fact upon which to rise, the position of Baur is surely tenable. Fact and truth have made history. The course of affairs has been moulded by definite events and actions which are known to have happened. Yet the study of history also reveals the influence of wrong or even of unfounded views upon individuals and communities; their conduct has been frequently determined and inspired by legends which had, as we now see, little or no basis in facts. It is a familiar axiom in history that what is believed to have occurred may be as important as what actually occurred.

"It is, of course, the object of every historian to recover, so far as is possible, the actual objective course of events. But the historian's duty is not limited to that. It does not follow in the least that if we can really settle the objective history of some event, we can afford to neglect the versions of it current at the time or subsequently. For it may turn out that beliefs as to what took place, though not corresponding to the facts, yet exercised a greater political and social influence than the facts themselves."[1]

Fictions are sometimes facts of real importance in history. The ideas which sway the actions of men often work upon them through the medium of myths and legends, which are coloured and distorted versions of what really occurred in the past. Their effectiveness depends less on the actual basis of fact which they contain than on what people believed them to contain. They made history, whether or not they were made out of history pure and simple.

[1] P. Gardner, *New Chapters in Greek History*, pp 5, 6.

This is a commonplace of historical research. It would be easy to illustrate it, e.g. by the Trojan legend, or by the legend of Charlemagne's attack upon the Saracens in the Carlovingian romances. To discover that the tradition or poetical representation does not correspond to the historical data is one thing; but it is quite another thing to admit the power exercised upon an uncritical, enthusiastic age by the tradition, not by the data themselves. So far as regards the New Testament, the principle only comes into limited operation; still, it must be reckoned with. And reckoned with in relation to documents as well, especially in relation to the class of "pseudonymous" writings, interpolated or composed in order to further some view or views of Church life, or to enhance the authority of some bygone saint. It is not enough to apply the critical process to these and bow them out of court, once their testimony has been shaken or disproved. They may not be "historical" in the sense that they afford evidence for the period which they propose to describe; but they are "historical" because they represent some feeling in their own age, and because they too have been accepted and acted upon for years. For example, the belief that Moses wrote the entire Pentateuch is unhistorical; but the belief of the Jewish editors of the Old Testament canon that he did so is an historical fact of profound significance both for Jewish and for Christian history. That David wrote the Psalter is a belief which is "historical," inasmuch as it entered into the mind of Jesus and his disciples.

It may be unhistorical, but then it helped to make history, and as such it must be reckoned with, like the belief that the apostle John wrote the Fourth gospel, or that the apostle Paul composed the epistles to Timothy and Titus.

IV

Literature is only a fractional expression of life, and of literature only a fraction ever survives. Religious life especially is a much more broad and deep movement than its extant literary records ever suggest, and this is true of the primitive Christian period. Besides, writings were current in that period which have not survived. Such considerations have to be faced frankly, in our historical approach to the New Testament. It is not merely the element of credulity or of imaginative power in the writers; it is the further question of whether the extant records are adequate, whether they give a comprehensive account of the salient features in the church-life of the period. The historical method is suspect because it appears to assume that the New Testament contains in black and white a complete account of the primitive gospel; in other words, because it isolates and insulates the New Testament as a treatise of or about early Christianity. Whereas that collection of books, it is argued, is but a partial reflection of the church-life from which and for which it originated. Consequently it is to the tradition of the Church that the inquirer must appeal. The New Testament may fail to mention this or that,

in the realm of belief or practice; but this silence is no argument against such a belief or practice, except on the unfair, unhistorical assumption that the historical method is able to discover within the pages of the New Testament a complete and coherent reflection of the original Christian religion.

The truth underlying this objection must be recognized, if the objection itself is to be fairly met. Not that the objection has always been put in a form that deserves refutation. For example, when John Knox[1] debated the question of ceremonies with a Roman friar at St. Andrews in 1547 and challenged his opponent to give any scriptural warrant for them, the friar in desperation declared "that the apostles had not received the Holy Ghost when they did write their epistles, but afterwards they received Him and then they did ordain the ceremonies." Such an explanation answers itself. But it is little less unconvincing than a subtler statement of the argument from silence which is more popular. This theory falls back upon a phrase in one of the stories about the period after the resurrection. We read how a sensational outburst of religious ecstasy marked the first festival of Pentecost for the adherents of Jesus. We also learn how the main part of the interval between the crucifixion and this festival had been filled up. For forty out of the fifty days Jesus was *issuing orders by the holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his sufferings he had shown them that he was alive by a number of proofs, revealing himself to them for forty days and discussing*

[1] *History of the Reformation in Scotland* (Ed. Laing), i. 199.

the affairs of God's realm.[1] Among other things, he ordered them to wait at Jerusalem for a baptism of the holy Spirit. This series of visions lasted for some time ("forty days" is, of course, a round symbolical number), and *the affairs of the divine kingdom* are probably the interests and prospects of the new messianic era, as we see from the context. But later tradition seized upon this tale for its own purposes. The forty days were extended to eighteen months and even twelve years, in order to allow time for the communication of a vast esoteric doctrine to the apostles. To gnostic and catholic Christians alike, this hint of a prolonged intercourse between the risen Jesus and his apostles proved of extraordinary value. On one hypothesis we are asked to believe that Jesus imparted secretly to his disciples during these weeks a complete system of Church orders, including the later episcopal organization, a body of religious dogma which they were to transmit to accredited successors, and the full ritual of the later Church. Since the Church could not at first receive so large a deposit of truth, it was held in reserve, gradually disclosed, and authoritatively elucidated, by the apostolic succession. It is therefore no argument against the truth of any rite or doctrine or ecclesiastical function, that it is in the background of the New Testament, or even that it is not in the New Testament at all. This would simply mean that the time was not ripe for it, in the providence of God.

The advantage of a hypothesis like this is that

[1] Acts i. 2–3.

it cannot be disproved by any effort of the historical method ; it soars airily over the ordinary categories of investigation. On the other hand, it never can be proved.

But, apart from such extravagant statements, the argument from silence carries with it real considerations which the historical method has to meet. Take the epistles, for example. It is manifest that they presuppose instruction already given upon faith and life ; they are not treatises drawn up to state the principles of Christianity at full length, but written as a rule in view of some local emergency. It is, therefore, not conclusive against the existence or the importance of a topic that it occupies little or even no space in these writings. This would not necessarily mean that the topic in question was unknown or of secondary importance ; the writer might fairly assume that his readers knew certain truths already, and he would not raise these questions, unless circumstances happened to require it. Had it not been for the irreverent behaviour of some Christians at Corinth, which prompted Paul to write out his views upon the Lord's Supper, we might not have had any indication of its significance or even of its existence in the early Church. Here is a case in point. The question is, how far can we extend inferences of this kind ? To what extent is the information of the New Testament to be supplemented by deductions from the later tradition of the Church ?

The reply might be outlined thus. The historical method may present the data of the New Testament

in such a way as to prove that, whatever be the gaps in our knowledge of the period, the essential features of primitive Christianity have been preserved. We may be ignorant of much in the life of Jesus and in the history of his Church during the first century; we may possess only tantalizing hints about certain phases and periods; the writers sometimes tell us what is of secondary importance for ourselves, and sometimes pass over what we would like to know about the faith and habits of the age; but we know the mind of Jesus Christ as we know few other truths in history; we can hardly miss what was regarded as primary in the new faith, and the *lacunæ* in the apostolic age, after all, occur in what are secondary departments of interest.

The truth is, that the argument from the occasional and fragmentary character of the New Testament writings may be unduly pressed. So far as the gospels go, they present what their writers conceived to be an adequate basis for belief. Luke declares in his preface that he has written out the story of Jesus for Theophilus, that his friend may know the solid truth of what he had been taught. The author of the Fourth gospel is well aware that his pages contain only a selection from the large amount of material about Jesus; still, he observes, these items *are recorded so that you may believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing may have life through his Name.*[1] There are gaps in the gospels. Our modern curiosity would like to have had information about several epochs in the life of

[1] John xx. 30, 31.

Jesus which are passed over in silence, and more information about some others that are barely mentioned. Indeed, so strongly was this felt that the manufacture of gospels or religious novels about the life of Jesus soon began. But they contain no real tradition which has been passed over by the canonical gospels, and we are justified in concluding that these four gospels offer an adequate store of material for knowing what Jesus was and what Jesus taught, that nothing essential to a real faith has been omitted, and that their pages contain whatever was salient and central in his life for those who desired to be in reliable communication with him.

A similar verdict may be passed upon the epistles. The New Testament records a segment of history in the first century, and as such a record it involves the application of the historical method. The least unsatisfactory definition of history is Dr. S. R. Gardiner's :

> "History is the record of change, of the new circumstances into which communities of men are brought, of the new ideas called forth by these circumstances, and by which circumstances are in turn moulded."

This may be a description rather than a definition, but it will serve our purpose. For one of the most significant features in primitive Christianity, as we find it reflected in the New Testament, is the interaction of ideas and events, and this interaction proceeds within the life of small communities, partially but characteristically reflected in the epistles which are extant. These epistolary writ-

ings take up simply the subjects which happened to be engrossing the writer and his readers; they are not elaborate statements of Christian truth. Often they allude in passing to topics which may conceivably have been much more central than we realize to-day. There is little that is systematic about their pages. Yet writings like First Peter, First John, and Ephesians, embody conceptions of Christianity which must have been widely current and deeply felt. Their range is large; it is the centre rather than the circumference which they touch. And this applies pre-eminently to Paul's epistles. Although his correspondence was elicited to the passing requirements of his churches, although his letters are occasioned by temporary needs and full of disputes and difficulties which have ceased to agitate the Christian mind, it is a mistake to regard them outright as a collection of incidental documents. The fact that a writing is due to some local emergency does not relegate it to the category of local literature. A young Frenchman consulted Burke in 1789 about the crisis in his country; Burke wrote out his mind for the benefit of his correspondent, but in answering M. Dupont's queries he was led to compose his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, a pamphlet of far more than topical interest. As one of its editors observes, this letter "embodies nothing of history save fragments which have mostly lost their interest, yet no book in the world has more historical significance." Paul's mind is fully set out in writings like Romans and

[1] Burke, *Select Works*, ed. by E. J. Payne, vol. ii. p. v.

Galatians and Colossians. It is absurd to imagine that in dealing with sporadic topics in these churches he has not uttered his convictions upon all that he regarded as organic to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And this, after all, is what matters. It is only when the New Testament is unhistorically regarded as a textbook for Christian belief or as a manual for Church practice, that the *lacunæ* become serious. We hear incidentally about matters like confirmation, the organization of the ministry, and Church worship. Historical research may throw further light upon such items. But the stress of the New Testament lies elsewhere, and the fullness with which the central truths of Christianity are presented is a reminder that the New Testament writings assign a supreme value to the subjects which fill their pages. If anything connected with vital Christianity is absent from the New Testament, we had better revise our ideas of what is " vital," instead of depreciating the New Testament itself.

In this connexion, and in conclusion, I would add that the New Testament displays a remarkable variety of life. It contains successive and independent interpretations of the gospel, which may be fairly held to reflect the different attitudes compatible with a living unity of faith. There is nothing stereotyped or oracular about the New Testament. It reflects an unsuspected diversity of types and temperaments. I note two instances of this, which are often overlooked. (i) It is sometimes assumed that in so credulous an age, when what we call

"miracles" were readily believed and as readily created, the so-called "miraculous" atmosphere predominated. But one great figure remained outside this influence. *John did no miracles, but all he ever said about* Jesus *was true.*[1] Such was the popular admission. It is significant that miracles were not attributed to this great and revered prophet, either by Jews or by Christians; his moral personality was honoured by tradition, and yet suffered no accretion of the miraculous. (ii) Another instance may be drawn from the ecstatic life of the early communities. The psychical excitement which found vent in prophesying and visions and other abnormal phenomena of the religious temperament is so strongly marked that we are apt to regard the primitive Christians as no more than Jump-to-Glory Janes and Bill Brays. But incidental allusions correct this estimate even of the popular gatherings. Thus in one of his earliest letters Paul has to warn some Christians at Saloniki against a depreciation of the prophetic gift. *Never disdain prophetic revelations, but test them all, retaining what is good.*[2] Evidently there were sober Christians who were repelled by the extravagant claims and conduct of enthusiasts, and who treated them much as bishop Butler treated Wesley, with a certain suspicion of ill-regulated ardour.

Such varieties of temperament illustrate the wide scope of the New Testament, when it is historically studied. They serve to corroborate the impression that when the argument from silence is fairly stated,

[1] John x. 41. [2] 1 Thess. v. 20, 21.

it does not affect the claim of the historical method to find in the New Testament an adequate and comprehensive reflection of the essentials in primitive Christian religion,

V

Finally, it is objected that this very emphasis upon the variety of types in the New Testament, upon the individuality of its writers, and upon the differences of outlook, destroys the unity of the New Testament. The ordinary Christian, who reads for practical guidance and personal inspiration, is at one here with the dogmatic theologian; both desire a New Testament which has for them something above the disintegrating results of historical interpretation, and both instinctively resent the latter. The way out of the *impasse* lies not in avoiding the historical method, however, but in following it. Not, I think, by attempting to discover a gospel of Jesus and a gospel about Jesus or, at the opposite extreme, by an exaggerated stress on Paulinism, but by essaying to estimate the records critically and constructively till they begin to disclose an essentially spiritual unity which carries with it the elements of a dogmatic. The dread and dislike of the historical method is natural. But it has to be overcome, and this will never be accomplished until the method itself is allowed to bring out the fact that the contrasts in the New Testament are held within a vital higher unity. As this is grasped, it will be possible to expect that

the method may help to hand back to the ordinary Christian as well as to the dogmatic theologian what they could never enjoy safely on the older hypothesis of verbal inspiration.

This, however, opens up a subject to which I must turn in next lecture.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LIMITATIONS OF HISTORICAL METHOD

IN discussing some of the objections to the historical approach to the New Testament, we have already found it necessary to define that method of approach more closely, in order to remove misconceptions and undermine a gratuitous disrespect for it. The earth is disquieted, said the Hebrew proverb, for a servant when he reigneth. There is enough of this kind of disquiet on earth at present, without historical criticism adding to it by any claim to dictate unduly in the realm of religion. The more the historical method knows its place, and keeps its place, the more likely it is to commend itself. Let me suggest, in addition to what I have already said upon this subject, some of the directions in which the claims of the historical method have to be qualified, and its range delimited.

I

Take, for example, the primary aim of the historical approach to the New Testament, the reconstruction of the historical setting in which Christianity arose. The aim and end of the historical imagina-

tion is to put ourselves, as far as possible, in the position of those to whom the words were at first spoken. We must create their world afresh for ourselves, with its far-off colour and shape, its environment and its atmosphere. William Morris opens the prologue to his *Earthly Paradise* by making this demand upon his readers :

" Forget six counties overhung with smoke,
Forget the snorting steam and piston-stroke,
Forget the spreading of the hideous town ;
Think rather of the pack-horse on the down,
And dream of London, small and white and clean,
The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green ;
Think, that below bridge the green lapping waves
Smite some few keels that bear Levantine staves . .
And cloth of Bruges, and hogsheads of Guienne ;
While nigh the thronged wharf Geoffrey Chaucer's pen
Moves over bills of lading."

That is, he asks and helps the reader to go back to the latter half of the fourteenth century, in order to understand his poem. So with the historical method ; it invites us to forget the intervening centuries, and to imagine, with the aid of research, the far-off conditions of life in which first-century Christianity arose, as these are represented or implied in the New Testament.

In passing, let me say that this mental discipline is by no means a purely antiquarian interest. Apart from what I have already urged (see above, p. 171), apart from the fact that most readers and students feel the vital need of adjusting their varieties of Christianity in some way to this classical expression of the faith, there is the further fact that such research enriches the mind in other directions. I do not

think that it is either fanciful or moralistic to suggest that this discipline of the historic imagination ought to foster the habit of sympathy and understanding which is so essential to social welfare at the present day. We are so reluctant to go beyond our own circle and range of interests. Yet to put ourselves into the place of other people, to realize how they live, to appreciate their difficulties, to penetrate below differences of class and education to our common need and nature—this is one of the clues to mutual service and human welfare. Discord rises generally from misunderstanding, and suspicion is invariably due to ignorance. Now it is much the same qualities that are required and developed by the historical method. It ought not to be more difficult, and it is certainly not less essential, to think ourselves into the position of our fellows to-day than to think ourselves back into the first century. In the one effort as in the other, it is necessary to avoid anything like superiority or patronage, to exercise patience, and to recognize affinities under strange guises. "True history," says Lord Morley, "is the art of *rapprochement*—bridging distances of place and circumstances." One of the ethical results of the study of comparative religion, for example, has been an increase in tolerance; by which of course I do not mean the rough-and-ready opinion that one religion is after all as good as another. Similarly, one by-product of the historical imagination at work upon the New Testament world may well be a greater breadth of mind, a larger flexibility of sympathy, an increased power of overcoming inherited prejudices

and of putting ourselves into the position of contemporaries who belong to other classes or nations than our own. A want of imagination is more responsible than anything else for our common failure to understand one another. We will not take the trouble to think, to look at others from the standpoint of their lot. It might be some help if we employed our imagination even on a remote past like the New Testament period; the effort might render us more alive to the need of a similar effort to understand the present.

This by the way, however. I want to admit candidly that such an effort of the historical imagination cannot yield us all we might expect. We have not, at least we have not yet, the materials for reconstructing the outer or the inner world of the New Testament with any completeness. Unfilled spaces remain in any synthesis we draw up. Economic life in Palestine, for example, is still uncertain for the most part, owing to our lack of contemporary evidence. So is our knowledge of the primitive missions in Palestine. So is our knowledge of the varieties which must have prevailed in the Jewish idea of the messiah and the kingdom—a subject of such importance for our knowledge of the rise of Paulinism. On these and a number of other topics, which are vital to a satisfactory estimate of primitive Christianity, we must admit frankly that nothing can be gained except a more or less reasonable probability. Several crucial phases in New Testament Christianity, as for example the prominence of the Eucharist, the relation of Paul's thought to earlier and

contemporary Christianity, and the rise of the term "lord" as applied to Jesus, are by no means so obvious and plain as some textbooks suggest.

II

Furthermore, the last word about New Testament problems like the consciousness of Jesus or any of the so-called "supernatural" phenomena, does not lie with the historical method. We scrutinize and sift, for example, the evidence for traditions like the virgin-birth, the so-called "miraculous stories," and the resurrection of Jesus. Literary and historical criticism analyses the data by the ordinary methods of research. Yet the conclusion seems to be that in the end these can neither be proved nor disproved by historical investigation; the ultimate decision lies with faith or, if you like, with dogma, at any rate with some factor which is introduced into the discussion. The historical method may determine the relative amount of probability in any case, and throw some light upon the origin of the belief from analogous phenomena. But the temptation to overrate its own capacities must be resisted.

The truth is, the historical method is in much the same position with regard to the New Testament religion as the scientific method is with regard to the universe; it can answer the How? but not the Why? One of the healthiest signs in the practice of the historical method is the increasing sense of its own limitations. The genesis and structure of a belief are its task, not the validity of the belief. It has now vindicated its right to live and work, and claimed

the sphere within which it can operate. But the more it is conscious of its domain, the more it is beginning to realize what lies beyond its particular categories. The task to which it addresses itself is that of viewing the Christian religion in its causal setting; it has a distinct contribution to make, and neither simple faith in tradition nor mystical speculation can deny its right to co-operate in the estimate of the Christian origins, provided, as I have already hinted (p. 180), that it does not go beyond its commission by committing itself to decisions upon matters like revelation, decisions which depend upon the unconscious or surreptitious introduction of some philosophical idea.

This does not imply that the historical student is reduced to the rank of the annalist or chronicler, whose chief function [1] is to register and record events, not to explain and interpret them. It means simply that in certain cases, as he deals with traditions in the New Testament, the historical inquirer who is scrupulous and competent must admit that his methods and data do not furnish a criterion for choosing finally between two or more possible explanations; his task ends by leaving the question open. No historical method, for example, can define the essence of Christianity without furtively employing metaphysical and philosophical principles.

III

The limitations of the historical method become still more obvious in the region of that ethical appli-

[1] Though the chronicle itself may be piquant reading.

cation which the New Testament is rightly as well as wrongly assumed to furnish.

It is something gained when the Christianity of the New Testament is realized to be a truth which needs to be practised as well as proved. The practical use of the New Testament is an indispensable clue to its inner meaning. To be sensible of this, to expect guidance and authoritative counsel from its pages, is to approach it for the original ends for which it was composed. For the New Testament is not a little collection of remote documents, whose stories are doubtful in the light of history, and whose ethical message is antiquated. Neither is it an Oriental anthology which may be left to exercise the ingenuity of scholars. It is in the world to do more than provide an interesting occupation for people who edit texts and practise the craft of criticism. It was not written for scribes, and it ought not to be left to scribes. Its pages contain religious realities which have been a spiritual treasure for men, and which are likely to remain so. One of the ends of historical research is to bring out the living and actual messages which this book carries for our world, and one of the growing convictions of thoughtful people in our own day is that, so far from requiring to be discarded as an obsolete production, the New Testament contains something which is ahead of our age, something which is essential to our well-being, something which may be translated into modern practice as the permanent basis of right relations between man and man.

But this process requires thought and care. There

are the two extremes, that of those who regard the New Testament as out of date, because they refuse to interpret its contents except in a literal, unhistorical temper, which does no manner of justice to the permanent value of much that is conveyed in some provisional Oriental setting, and that of those who, with equal disregard of historical perception, take it over literally and prosaically as a model for present-day practice. The latter method has been responsible in large measure for the tendency to discredit the New Testament which characterizes the former party. What the historical approach means, is that a truer estimate of the writings is put forward than could be reached so long as they were regarded as equally and verbally inspired.

The position now is, that the New Testament is not a code any more than a deposit or a germ; it presents not even materials for a code which can be applied to ecclesiastical and social life, but a spiritual impulse which creates a moral consciousness of unrivalled range. The spirit or creative power pours from the life of Jesus Christ and from those whom he inspired; it is a life, the method of life. It expresses itself in his words and deeds primarily, then in the thoughts and actions of his followers as communities. These expressions in the New Testament are always related to specific historical situations; they are not abstract statements thrown into the air, but struck out from the clash of the Christian spirit with definite occasions. The first way to distinguish what is fundamental in any expression, and to appreciate the temporary elements, is to realize

as exactly as possible the historical conditions under which the particular statement was made. And, while this consideration applies to the theology in particular, it bears with equal weight upon the ethical inferences and implications. These are particularly difficult to understand (see above, p. 173). It is more easy to enter into the meaning of what the New Testament has to say about forgiveness and prayer, for example, than to form a true notion of what is meant for us by the sayings of Jesus to his contemporaries about questions like divorce, trade, property and politics. The reason is that the passage of the centuries alters the social setting more than the religious. Our position to-day, economically and politically, is not that of the Palestinian peasants and tradesmen to whom Jesus spoke, nor of the citizens in towns of Asia Minor and Greece to whom Paul wrote. The New Testament provides many striking and searching words about duties and responsibilities. But if we are to touch their spirit instead of being content with their letter, if the New Testament is to be more to us than the Koran would be to adherents of Islam if they lacked the Traditions, it is impossible to apply these sayings profitably in every case to ourselves unless account is taken of their original object, and therefore of their limited and special range.

Take, for example, one of the least inadequate definitions of Christianity. Ritschl [1] defines it thus :

"Christianity is that monotheistic religion, wholly spiritual and ethical, which, based upon the life of its author as redeemer and as the founder of the Kingdom of God, consists in the freedom

[1] *Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, iii. 14.

of divine sonship, involves the impulse to active conduct from the motive of love, aims at the moral organization of mankind, and lays the basis of bliss in sonship towards God as well as in the Kingdom of God."

The important phrase for our present purpose is that Christianity " aims at the moral organization of mankind." This duty of Christianizing the social order and of pressing the Christian principles of brotherhood and justice upon men, emerges with special urgency at every period when civilization is being poured into fresh moulds. Christianity as a living faith has the singular power of adapting itself to its changing environment and of assimilating what it requires in order to meet the needs of mankind. But from time to time this movement passes through critical phases, when a twofold attitude is assumed towards Christianity by leaders of social revolt and reform. Some bitterly dispense with any aid from the Church ; they identify organized Christianity with capitalism or clericalism or a compact body of vested ecclesiastical interests or a reactionary synthesis which is insulated from any contact with the aspirations of the oppressed. Others may feel for the affinities between their social movement and the essential Christian gospel, and honestly use what they consider the heart of Christianity to vivify their enterprise. Instead of illustrating this obvious fact from the contemporary world, let us recall what happened a century and more ago in Europe, when Christianity had to suffer for the shortcomings and inconsistencies of some of its representatives, and when it also was hailed as an implicit re-interpretation of progressive ideals.

Michelet, for instance, declared that if the French Revolution had put itself under the flag of Luther or of Calvin, "it would have been an abdication. The Revolution adopted no Church. Why? Because it was itself a Church." Michelet's *French Revolution* may be, as Frederic Harrison admitted, a dramatic poem rather than a history; but it thrills with sympathy, even with awe and adoration, for a struggle which evoked self-sacrifice, brotherhood, and an energy of enthusiasm, to carry out the deliverance of man from what Michelet conceived to be an organized monarchical system of arbitrary divine grace and human favour, in which the essential justice and rights of the soul were denied. The Christianity he saw was a reactionary autocracy; the Revolution he worshipped was a higher religion. And this is the point that concerns us. Men may to-day, like Michelet in last century, find a true religion in social reform and even in social revolution; some movement in favour of human justice and better conditions for the people, may seem to develop the qualities which are characteristic of Christianity itself, especially a self-sacrificing passion for fellowship and brotherhood and freedom, for the rights of personality and the realization of a human, humane ideal in the world. On the other hand there may be, among progressives, an instinctive sense of affinity with aims and ideals latent in the New Testament, which is more positive than what French enthusiasts of last century felt—the vague instinct which dominated men like Mazzini and, later on, Tolstoy. Indeed, the ardour

stirred by the French Revolution in the next age made special use of it. Edgar Quinet could declare that the French Revolution was "more loyal to the spirit of Christ than the Church itself"; Lamartine wrote, in his famous line, "La Verbe est fait humanité." Many believed that the remedy for the world's evils was the ethic of the New Testament gospel, the spirit of the humane, human Jesus, who was the friend of the poor, the lover of truth, the critic of priests, and the prophet of a simple faith in God and man.

In a situation like this, the historical method of approaching the New Testament has indeed a contribution to offer to critics and champions alike of Christianity, whether they are irresponsible or thoughtful; but the contribution is limited. The issue has to be met by larger considerations, drawn from a study of the philosophical and historical implicates of the Christian faith as these have been realized throughout the centuries. The function of the historical method is restricted.

(*a*) At the outset, it often suggests a *caveat.* The New Testament, interpreted by its canons, refuses to yield all the justification which progressives sometimes profess to find in its pages for their methods and ends. For example, well-meaning enthusiasts are occasionally fond of describing vital Christianity as revolutionary. True Christians, they say, are men who "turn the world upside down." But this phrase is a libel upon Christianity. It is the language of the malignant Jews at Saloniki, who, unable to thwart Paul and Silas in their

mission, accused them of treason and sedition. *These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also*—so the Jews and their tools, *lewd fellows of the baser sort*, alleged to the authorities. The apostles, they urged, *are all violating the decrees of Cæsar by declaring some one else called Jesus is king*.[1] In one sense, the accusation was true, unconsciously true. Christianity implies a radical change in many conventional practices and opinions; it does upset the world of easy-going, selfish men. But the primitive Christians did not dream of overturning the political and social order of the Empire. Now and then persecution and an outraged sense of injustice did provoke revolutionary anticipations. The book of Revelation, for example, that latter-day pamphlet, is aglow with a prophetic exultation over the doom which the writer expected ere long to overtake the Roman Empire; a foreshortened view of the world, due to apocalyptic predilections, stirred the expectation that the State would be overthrown. But this mood was not normal. And even the Apocalypse expected the Roman Empire to be replaced, not by another social order, but by a supernatural re-constitution of the universe.

We touch here one of the reasons why the historical view of the New Testament honestly discourages rapid and hasty applications of its language to a later age—I mean, the widespread belief in the imminent end of the world, which is technically called apocalyptic eschatology. Once this is grasped, it is more easy to see why, at first sight, the New

[1] Acts xvii. 5–7.

Testament does not seem to throw much direct light upon our modern social problems. The " false prophets " of the Old Testament took part in political issues ; indeed, all the prophets flung out social programmes for their day, since for them the nation and the religious community were one. The theocratic category obtained. But in the New Testament the prophets speak to the Church alone. The conditions of the age had altered, and the primitive Christians had no intimate responsibilities for the State. Jesus certainly did not identify his kingdom with any economic revolution, and Paul, when he reached Corinth, did not attack the social problems there. This, I repeat, was (i) partly owing to the strong eschatological feeling in the Church. But (ii) partly also it sprang from the profound sense that the religious aims of Jesus Christ were absorbing, and could be attained, whatever were the local circumstances. Many of our most pressing modern problems were not on the horizon of the first century, and the New Testament therefore cannot offer us materials for legislating with regard to them. What it does contribute is the spirit in which they are to be met, the vital principles that must dominate the relation of man to God and man to man.

These two reasons are noteworthy.

(i) The eschatological factor is more visible in a writer like Paul than in Jesus. It is important, for what one believes about the duration of the world does affect one's ethical outlook. But it is not to be exaggerated. For example, there are sections of the ethical message of Jesus which are

not dependent upon the eschatological hope; it is not eschatology which puts an edge upon the teaching of parables like those of the Good Samaritan or of the profligate son. Jesus did not tell men to be forgiving or even to beware of amassing wealth, because it was not worth their while to harbour grudges or to grow rich. His ethical teaching is not a series of provisional instructions for behaviour during the brief interval before the end, as if natural ties did not matter, or as if his interest in the present world amounted to little more than some passing glances which were irrelevant to his main passion for the coming catastrophe. He laid down in his teaching the laws and principles of the coming reign of God over men, showing how even in the present age, for all its hindrance and handicaps, men must obey them. The historical method insists upon the apocalyptic hope in the mind of Jesus, but not upon it as the full clue to his mind, as though his counsels were of temporary value.[1]

(ii) The other reason may be illustrated specifically by two considerations, which at the same time raise the eschatological problem. One is the New Testament's attitude to money, the other is its attitude to slavery.

The New Testament has two warnings against riches; one is against them as a source of injustice and cruelty, the other is against their tendency to

[1] I have discussed this elsewhere, in my *Theology of the Gospels*, pp. 59 f. The whole subject is handled well by Dr. Hastings Rashdall in *Conscience and Christ* as well as by Dr. S. H. Mellone in *The New Testament and Modern Life*.

hamper the soul of their possessor. These are not to be distinguished as the social and religious aspects of wealth; both are regarded as affecting religion. But the main stress falls upon the second, especially in the teaching of Jesus. Here it is not always easy to be sure of the facts, for the sayings have been passed through an "ascetic" tendency by Luke, whose gospel sharpens a number of them. But Jesus evidently regarded money as connected with the godless and evil world. It was to him essentially inferior in the religious life. He viewed it as a tainted possession, which in the shape of great wealth was rarely gained and employed without injustice. At the same time, wealth by itself is not invariably regarded as anti-divine, any more than the poor are regarded as essentially religious. Poverty means the pressure of anxious care, the pinch of need, the disheartening sense of insecurity, and all the miseries that follow life on the edge of starvation and under the haunting fear of unemployment. Yet men may get free from this without necessarily being religious. What Jesus warned men against, poor or rich, was the love of money or covetousness, the grasping temper which, by its love of property, induced selfishness and heartlessness, and at the same time diverted men from inward satisfaction with God.

But a man might act upon the word of Jesus to one of his would-be adherents, sell all his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor, for various reasons. His motive may be specifically religious; that is, he may be convinced that wealth is so dangerous to his spiritual well-being that he had

better get rid of it. The uppermost thought in his mind may be, not the good he can do by distributing his money among the poor, not even the partial reparation he can make for gains unjustly earned, but the larger freedom and purity which he thereby secures for his personal religious life. He is freeing himself from encumbrances to his higher being. Or again, his motive may be the sincere conviction that he has no right to enjoy such wealth, when it might profit others by being distributed. This is unselfish, but the former motive need not be selfish. The man's conception of spiritual welfare may include, and in Christianity must include, the ideal of service. By parting with his possessions he renders himself more efficient in service to his God and his fellows. He can do more for them by stripping himself of personal property, since this renunciation adds to his character.

The historical method, therefore, shows that in treating the question of money Jesus did so from a specifically religious standpoint. Whatever economic inferences may be drawn from his teaching at any period, it has to be recollected that the dominating idea in his mind was unworldliness, the thought of the hindrances offered by wealth to the health of the human soul.

This is even more clear in the primitive Christian attitude towards evil and misery, as represented by slavery. That emancipation is allied to the spirit of the New Testament, we can all recognize to-day. But it took long before the conscience of Christendom was awakened to the crime of slavery

as an infringement of personality. The prevailing eschatological temper of the primitive Church helps to explain why the anti-Christian character of slavery could not yet be realized. Later on, the conservative dread of disturbing the social fabric of the State began to operate. But even then the acquiescence of the Church in the existence of slavery was due, at bottom, to the religious conception that the main end was to produce Christians from any and all classes of society, to disregard rather than to remove social inequalities, and to lay stress upon the fact that slaves could be Christians. This was all the more easy, since the majority of the slaves who joined the early Church were not serfs.

"Christian slaves are probably for the most part to be reckoned in the category of house-slaves—a category which was not over large—or else to the category of those who carried on some trade under the orders and with the resources of their masters, and who, though remaining slaves in the eyes of the law, enjoyed from the economic and the personal point of view a considerable amount of independence."[1]

Yet, while this makes the attitude of the early Church more intelligible, it does not alter the underlying principle on which the Church authorities acted, viz., that slavery did not form an impossible soil for the fruits of Christian character, and therefore might be regarded as a providential condition of the world with which they were not called upon to interfere. It was an attitude which might appeal, no doubt, to the timid and time-serving spirit, which is one besetting temptation of all churches, especially of national churches. Yet the New Testament

[1] Troeltsch, *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen*, p. 22 *n*.

teaching did justify some in saying quite sincerely that social distinctions were nothing in the Church, and that the real slavery was slavery to sin. The conviction of this did not tend to social reform. But it was not in every case a convenient high-sounding pretext for evading a social problem.

Indeed the same attitude has been taken up with regard to other forms of social misery and inequality. The truth that poverty is or may be a fine moral discipline may produce (at least among those who are not poor) a certain indifference to real hardships, simply because people are convinced that the highest life does not consist in material possessions for themselves or for others, nor in security of existence. They may acquiesce in abuses, in injustice, in oppression, they may at best alleviate them rather than remove them, conscious that out of these God can make materials for that character of faith and humility which is to them the chief end of man on earth. Thus we have the perplexing paradox that over and again the driving force for social reform has come from men who were indifferent to religious ends, while the religious members of society either held aloof from the movement or joined it later. The other-worldly temper, which is not always identical with the eschatological temper although it often produces similar results, induces some natures to condone or to ignore external handicaps, while those who see the one sphere of happiness in this world and in a more or less material well-being, are naturally whetted to a humanitarian zeal.

The task of meeting such issues of the hour

with intelligence as well as with sympathy, plainly involves a wider range of Christian perception than the historical study of the New Testament can furnish. The later experience of the Church, the accumulated sense of tradition, and the living spirit of the Christian religion are all required in order to determine the practical line of duty for Christians, individually or corporately, at any modern crisis which raises problems of this order. The historical approach to the New Testament has only the subordinate, though essential, task of ascertaining the central interests of Jesus amid the varying points of view in the New Testament, and of emphasizing his primary religious outlook as the dominating consideration.

(*b*) This may sound elementary and obvious. But it is apt to be ignored, as in one current trend of interpretation; it may be argued, it is argued, for example, that we must take over the ecclesiastical and the social ideals of the Old Testament. It is said that while the New Testament period does not show any priesthood or sacrificial system, this was due to temporary exigencies; these were implicit in the order of religion, and once the Church came to arrange its own household in the larger world, after the final break with Judaism, she adopted and adapted what she could from the organization of Old Testament religion at its best. Or again, it is contended that in taking over the Old Testament the Church committed herself to the social ideals of the prophets, that, once she reached a position of effective independence in the

Roman Empire, such as she could not enjoy during the New Testament period, she was bound and is still bound to carry on the functions and aims of the Old Testament prophets who sought to reform the civilization of their day.

Such a desire to find Biblical justification for an ecclesiastical or economic programme is natural. It may be conservative or constructive; it may be due to an instinct for self-preservation or to an ardent progressive temper. It has at least the double merit of realizing that Christianity must not be allowed to fall behind or below the demands of the day, and that it goes back to a long historical process. In some developments it professes itself serenely indifferent to historical research upon the New Testament, partly from the sense that this method has little or nothing relevant to offer, partly from the conviction that the results are already clear in a study of the Old Testament. And indeed the historical method must stand aside from several applications of this theory. They draw upon considerations which lie outside its special sphere. The one contribution which the historical method can make is, I repeat, to offer a valuation of the New Testament, to admit, as it must do frankly, that the New Testament contains a large element of what is provisional and temporary in practice as well as in interpretation, and at the same time to bring out its classical and fundamental features, its religious adequacy, its ethical standards, its characteristic principles, and the significance of what it omits or depreciates.

Of the two items in this favourite argument, I select the second as bearing on our immediate subject.

From the Old Testament we learn that in the days " when the old social system, based on peasant proprietorship, began to break up and left a dangerous gulf between the rich nobles and the landless or impoverished classes,"[1] the prophets showed active sympathy with the oppressed, denounced luxury and land-grabbing, and demanded justice for the forlorn. Their religious message involved a stringent protest against the national and social crimes of the day. As leaders of a new religious movement, they pled for a reorganization of society upon moral principles answering to the law of God, which required humanity, justice, and goodwill from His people. But their practical proposals were generally no more than a return to older and simpler ways of living. They urged the fundamental basis of social order, but, confronted with the complex, artificial civilization of the later monarchy, they fell back as a rule upon the archaic primitive ideals of the nation. The agricultural labourers and farmers were finding it more and more difficult to maintain themselves, under the grinding taxation which followed the imperialistic policy. As in the Roman Empire of a later day, so in the eighth century B.C. the peasantry were being drawn into a hopeless net by the development of higher politics and the monied classes; large estates absorbed the small proprietor, and the poor grew disheartened

[1] W. Robertson Smith, *The Prophets of Israel*,[2] p. 68.

in the town and on the land alike by their inability to secure their rights. These rights of the people, against the officials and the rich, were championed by prophets like Micah and Amos, who understood the causes of their disaffection and resented their disabilities. Yet, so far as a practical programme of reform went, the prophets had little or nothing to offer except a renascence of social conditions which had long ceased to exist. They looked back to an age of simple, peasant proprietors, or to a golden age of monarchy such as David was supposed to typify. Material prosperity and a civilization which bred social misery and bitter class distinctions were to be thrown over, for a simplified revival of bygone agriculturalism. Nothing came of it. Nothing could come of it. The prophets did better when they pled vaguely but splendidly for a truer government, or for a change in the soul as the centre and hope of all social regeneration. Any national revival that came was along these lines. No doubt, upon the whole, it was the passionate ideals of the prophets that flamed before the people; they endeavoured to uphold principles that were being forgotten or defied, elementary principles of social health and welfare, which a true faith in Yahweh involved. But Jesus and his followers, in different political conditions, attached themselves to the definite religious appeals of the prophets rather than to their social programmes. *I will have mercy and not sacrifice,* was evidently a favourite text of Jesus (see above, p. 84). He was supremely concerned about the double danger of religion

being spoiled by ceremonialism and of morality being spoiled by religion. Not that his message was a mere individualism; he made brotherhood the test of his followers. But the stress of his teaching was upon the inward life which was the source and strength of all outward relations in society.

It may be argued fairly that, as the horizon has changed since the first century, since social problems confront Christianity to-day which were hardly visible then, or at any rate, only visible in very different and much more elementary forms, it is incumbent upon us to apply the Christian principle afresh by reviving the prophetic ideals and functions of the Old Testament, in order to inculcate a sensitiveness to civic and political sins, and so forth. This may be true. But it raises the larger question of the Bible as distinct from the New Testament in the Christian Church, and in any case the one duty of the historical method as applied to the New Testament is to bring out the original force of the latter, to indicate its limitations and range of application, and to insist that Christianity must introduce no items into its practical programme which are radically inconsistent with the fundamental religious ideas of Christ. The experience of the past renders the need of this patent. Applications of the Old Testament to the social and political fabric have too often been made which were unhistorical and shrill, which ignored the spirit of Jesus Christ, and which confused ardent zeal with patient study of the situation. A deeper study of the Old Testa-

ment itself will doubtless serve to protect us in future against such hasty efforts, with all the disenchanting experiences which their failure entails. But the historical study of the New Testament is also necessary, in order to steady the mind and quicken the conscience, and to prevent the New Testament from being taken for less than it is as well as for more than it is.

(*c*) The historical method further confines the sayings of Jesus to their religious sphere, by showing that whatever be their authority, it is not legal. This may often seem to restrict their range unduly; in reality, it reveals their edge and force. In limiting their application, the historical method brings out their intensity, and by limiting itself to their original and essential bearing it is at once true to its own function and serviceable to genuine Christianity.

To illustrate the impossibility of turning the demands of Jesus upon his followers into a legal code for social order, I shall take one of his most penetrating words upon the vital significance of inward motive and intention. *You have heard how it used to be said, "Do not commit adultery." But I tell you, any one who even looks with lust at a woman has committed adultery with her already in his heart.*[1] That is, in the sight of God the impure heart is as guilty as the impure deed; even if the sensual longing is never translated into the gross act, it is condemned; the mere imagination of evil is noted and judged by God who searches the heart. This is part of the stress upon inwardness which

[1] Matt. v. 27, 28.

characterizes the high ethics of Jesus. But plainly it is a judgment within the religious sphere. From the standpoint of social morality, which conserves the order of human life, a base look or intention is not so disastrous as the base action which corresponds to it. The one does not really come within the purview of legislation. Morality, as viewed by a social code, emerges in definite actions which can be noted and punished, in deeds which are plain and unmistakable. The criminal code takes account of actual breaches of the sexual relation; it has no jurisdiction over the inner world of motive and emotion, where Jesus lays down this stringent law. The social code deals with the consequences of the crime; it may endeavour to prevent occasions of the crime, by introducing repressive legislation, but even so its range does not extend to the sphere of intention.

The moral organization of mankind, therefore, may be an object of Christianity, but the enterprise cannot call upon the historical study of the New Testament to furnish material for a moral code which would apply to people who did not recognize the inwardness of what Jesus taught.

The point is so acute that I shall take another instance of it, not only because this particular instance is often overlooked, but because it survives in a keen form to-day; I mean, the difference between the Western and the Eastern conceptions of justice and punishment. The method of our European, Christian civilization implies two principles: (i) That the prosecution of an offender is

the business of the State, rather than of the individual who has been avenged, and (ii) that every offence entails an adequate penalty. But neither principle is recognized in the East. Thus :

" Our stern sense of justice, meted out with equal hand, never wavering, never forgiving, paying little heed to the complex questions of temperament, environment, temptation, etc., strikes the Eastern as simply barbarous. The man who, though having just cause for anger, yet refuses to punish and forgives time after time, that is the man who is most respected. One has to realize this point of view to understand the exhortation : ' Not until seven times ; but until seventy times seven.' " " We accept the principle that an offence entails a penalty ; we do not think about the question at all. There exists no such doctrine in Mohammedan countries, nor probably in any Eastern country. The Koran, it is true, provides penalties, sometimes of extreme severity ; but it is left to the injured person to demand their application. The punishment of the offender is not the duty of the State, but the right of the injured."[1]

It may be argued that this is only one more reason for revising our penology. But it is difficult to see how the European system of justice, which has proved itself so beneficial, could be diluted with such Christian or moralistic principles and yet retain its effectiveness. The limits left to the individual's freedom of choice, in deciding whether or not he will prosecute an offender, must be comparatively narrow, for the sake of social welfare. Prosecution does not necessarily involve an unforgiving spirit. We see that, however hard it may be for Orientals to grasp it. In truth, the difficulty really goes back to the difference between the

[1] From a thoughtful article on " Love and the Law : a Study of Oriental Justice," by Mr. A. Mitchell Innes (*Hibbert Journal*, January, 1913, pp. 275–277).

Oriental and the Western, the ancient and the modern ideals. To the one, government is a religious system, the practical embodiment of the religious principles which control the community and the individual alike. To the other, the individual's religious attitude is separable from his social attitude; as a citizen he acts in ways which are not always the ways followed by him as a religious man. This does not mean that a Western, so-called Christian State cannot upon occasion exhibit generosity and forbearance; it can and it does, to a beaten foe. But in its code of justice, it does not pretend to embody that forgiveness which its Christian members are expected to show to one another as individuals. Neither must it be inferred that judges and magistrates disregard equity or even are debarred from considerations of mercy in deciding individual cases. But the administration of justice is controlled by principles which restrict any arbitrary, generous interference on the part of an individual with claims to compensation and retaliation, either in civil or in criminal cases.

You may retort that all this denotes a restriction of the New Testament message rather than any self-imposed restriction of the historical method. But the one follows from the other. It is not, I reiterate, that the historical method claims any monopoly of interpretation, as if the sayings of Jesus, for example, were not capable of fresh and fuller application in the later contact of a living faith with the problems of social disorder and reconstruction. It is merely that in confining itself to the original meaning of

these sayings as they fell from the lips of Jesus, the historical method claims to reach what is fundamental and thereby to suggest some wholesome checks upon any modernizing process of re-interpretation, as if the modern mind could simply transfer things from the New Testament to a later situation. There is a danger of people nowadays using New Testament phrases more or less unconsciously for ideals and aims which are not always the same as the Christian realities. Familiarity with the New Testament and an ardent, vague humanitarianism may lead to a misleading employment of language about the kingdom of heaven, the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and so on, just as some who are most keen upon the supernatural aspect of Christianity are curiously indifferent to its supernatural element. Against this illegitimate habit, which besets the practical interest in Christianity, historical criticism does well to protest, if only by insisting and concentrating upon its own restricted sphere, since that insistence is a reminder of the proportions and context of the material in question.

IV

Finally, the limitations of the historical method have to be recognized in relation to the devotional use of the New Testament.

In approaching the New Testament along the lines of historical research, we certainly gain a new sense of reality (see above, p. 171), which is indispensable to devotion, unless the latter is to be fan-

tastic and sentimental. Also, the method does produce a new sympathy with the religion of the primitive Church; if truly followed, it emancipates the mind from anything like a patronizing or superior attitude to Jesus and his first disciples. In one sense we may say that the devotional attitude is the criterion of the historical as well as of the doctrinal interest in the New Testament, and that the historical method is an aid here as elsewhere by putting us into touch with a Lord who is real, not a projection of our private fancies, and with living truth, which after all is the source of devotion as it is of moral courage—for the religious mind has a vital interest in truth. Yet more than all this is required in order to possess the faculty of appreciating the inward meaning and message of the New Testament. It is an insight which is aided but not produced by the historical method. We may take the parallel case of artistic appreciation as an illustration of this.

"A picture, however admirable the painter's art and wonderful his power, requires of the spectator a surrender of himself, in due proportion with the miracle which has been wrought. Let the canvas glow as it may, you must look with the eye of faith, or its highest excellence escapes you. There is always the necessity of helping out the painter's art with your own resources of sensibility and imagination. Not that these qualities shall really add anything to what the master has effected; but they must be put so entirely under his control and work along with him to such an extent, that in a different mood, when you are cold and critical instead of sympathetic, you will be apt to fancy that the loftier merits of the picture were of your own dreaming, not of his creating. Like all revelations of the better life, the adequate perception of a great work of art demands a gifted simplicity of vision!" [1]

[1] Hawthorne, *Transformation* (ch. xxxvii.).

That is, for appreciation there must be a certain sympathy; the full meaning is not yielded to any critical acuteness which maintains an attitude of detached impartiality, such as must hang round the efforts of most criticism. The same principle applies in literary criticism. It is recognized, for example, by so cool a judge as Sir Leslie Stephen, when he comes to review William Law's *Serious Call to a Devout Life*. He frankly acknowledges that a purely literary critic has limitations in handling such a treatise.

> "Perhaps, indeed, there is a touch of profanity in reading in cold blood a book which throughout palpitates with the deepest emotions of its author, and which has thrilled so many sympathetic spirits. The power can only be adequately felt by readers who can study it on their knees."[1]

Now the historical method cannot produce this. It has no right to decry it, much less to offer itself as a substitute for such an inward attitude of appreciation.

At the same time, the historical method need not block the way to this devotional enjoyment and understanding of the New Testament. To concentrate upon the original meaning, to reconstruct the bearings of a New Testament passage upon its immediate circle in the first century, is to do much, but not to do all. It would be pedantic and unhistorical in the extreme to imagine that the words of the New Testament cannot suggest to our minds more than they did to those who first heard or read

[1] *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. ii. p. 394.

them. The New Testament, like all great literature, becomes charged with associations and fuller meanings, as it lives on for those who use it. It is the property of a classic to contain more than is at first intelligible, to gain or rather to reveal a reach of which possibly even its original author was not fully conscious. "Thoughts were given" to them "beyond their thought." Even when we withhold from the New Testament any special predicate of inspiration, we are bound to allow it what we allow to writers like Homer, Virgil, Dante, or Shakespeare. Its words carry far beyond their original circle, and their message is inexhaustible. A man may come by experience of life to find that passages from Homer and Horace appeal to him "as if he had never before known them," and then he begins

> "to understand how it is that lines, the birth of some chance morning or evening at an Ionian festival, or among the Sabine hills, have lasted generation after generation, for thousands of years, with a power over the mind, and a charm, which the current literature of his own day, with all its obvious advantages, is utterly unable to rival." [1]

So with the New Testament writings. Their authors do not always realize the truth and range of what they see and recount. Fuller experience is required to draw this out, and the same applies to the effect of their words.

It was the instinctive sense of this growing, timeless significance in the New Testament which was one of the motives for constructing a theory of verbal inspiration and infallibility. Historically,

[1] Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, p. 78.

no doubt, the origin and development of the notion of verbal inspiration is quite intelligible; the doctrine was a scholastic attempt of the Re-formed Church to safeguard what was believed to be the authority of the New Testament against a twofold contemporary depreciation, by the doctrine of tradition in the Roman Church and by the doctrine of the inner Light in mystical and pietistic circles. But the religious instinct, to which the later scholasticism did so little justice, held to the belief that the New Testament was the medium of intercourse between God and the human soul, not a book of truths to be accepted, not merely a record of revelation, not an inheritance from the early Church, but a direct gift and communication of God to man. When applied to doctrine, this claim of divine authority for the New Testament involved great difficulties. It was less liable to misconception and abuse, so long as it bore upon the place of the New Testament in the Christian experience. What helped to keep it vital was the close connexion of the Word and the Sacraments in the Reformed Churches; in both, it was held, men enjoyed a direct fellowship with God, which was not dependent upon either tradition or priest, and both had the power of conveying God's truth and grace immediately to the soul. The New Testament was thus by no means isolated. The devotional use of it was safeguarded from individualism and caprice by its vital association with the Sacraments, as a means of grace, which conveyed the expression of God's mind and purpose.

What corresponds to this nowadays in many circles is at once less dogmatic and less naïve; it is expressed in the admission, "We read the New Testament like any other book, and still it is to us what no other book can be," or in the richer claim that as the record of God's revelation it puts us into a direct, personal relation to God, since it forms an integral part of the revelation itself, and therefore through it God can generate similar religious experiences still.[1] The truth is that the critical study of the New Testament is at variance with the older, naïve use of the Bible; it does not directly foster the meditative and receptive spirit which is essential to such a nexus, and which throve on the hypothesis of verbal inspiration. For example, probably few passages in the New Testament are read with more difficulty and questioning than the narratives of the resurrection of Jesus, once the historical temper has been aroused. Their variety and their visions are apt to excite our critical faculty, till we treat them as puzzles—extremely important puzzles, no doubt, still puzzles that embarrass us or call for explanation. We feel that they contain elements which we cannot honestly and heartily assimilate, at least without an effort. This is partly because we read the narratives together, whereas each was originally meant to be read separately; hence we are alive to their inconsistencies and contradictions. And yet these narratives have an extraordinary appeal. It is a fact, explain it as we may, that they have something for the plain mind which comes

[1] Rothe, *Zur Dogmatik*, p. 155.

home in such a way as to render the reader unconscious of any difficulties. They seem to attest themselves, for those who are brought face to face with the question of a future life.

I recall at the moment a couple of instances of this. Mr. William de Morgan tells how the old lady in his story, who missed her dead husband,

"appeared to read and re-read the gospels and the *Vicar of Wakefield*. Whenever Alice found her reading the former, she would look over her shoulder to find where she was reading. It was almost always the story of the Resurrection. She once accounted for this to Alice: 'You see, my darling,' she said, 'it may be really true, and not only like going to Church.' There was every reason to suppose that the main thought current in her mind was: Should she meet her husband again, or not? She had evidently had a dose of Sunday religion in her youth, and did not find it a tower of strength. She fell back on the best translation she could get of the original story." [1]

If you demur to that as fiction—though it may be truth embodied in a tale—here is plain fact. On July 22, 1863, Walt Whitman spent the afternoon with a young American soldier, dying of his wounds, and he writes the following narrative of his experience. It is in *Specimen Days in America*. The lad

"asked me to read him a chapter in the New Testament. I complied, and ask'd him what I should read. He said, 'Make your own choice.' I open'd at the close of one of the first books of the evangelists, and read the chapters describing the latter hours of Christ, and the scenes at the crucifixion. The poor, wasted young man ask'd me to read the following chapter also,

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[1] *Alice-For-Short*, ch. xlv.

how Christ rose again. I read very slowly, for Oscar was feeble. It pleased him very much, yet the tears were in his eyes. He ask'd me if I enjoy'd religion. I said, 'Perhaps not, my dear, in the way you mean, and yet, may be, it is the same thing.' He said, 'It is my chief reliance.' "

Biography contains numerous instances of this direct, devotional contact with the narratives of the resurrection. The simplicity and the conviction with which they are told appear to impress the mind of those who are morally susceptible to the message they convey.

The truth is, that in its moments of anguish or of ardour, perplexed by the sheer misery of the world or haunted by the sense of an indifferent order of nature, struggling with the demands of God and the duties of human life, or facing the tragic facts of sin and guilt and death, the soul understands the New Testament as it was meant to be understood and as it always has been understood by some on earth; here it meets the revelation of a living God with pardon and peace, enjoying direct intercourse with a Lord who liberates and renews and understands. Those who belong to any of the various Christian communities which have somehow adjusted themselves to the New Testament by means of doctrines about tradition and inspiration, are specially open to this devotional influence. The collective experience of the Christian past creates an atmosphere in which the New Testament vibrates for the present and acquires sacramental efficacy. The constant use of it in religious discipline and direction charges its language with inspiration and impulse for the devout soul, till it ceases to be a

mere world of echoes and reminiscences. But the historical method is not necessarily at variance with this use of the New Testament, unless we persist in regarding that method as dry and detached—which is as uncritical as to imagine that the knowledge of sciences like botany and geology impairs an eager appreciation of nature. Historical and literary criticism of the New Testament may indeed, at some stages, preoccupy the mind with considerations which do not make for any devotional use; the process of research may induce uneasiness by appearing to leave us amid the débris of an historical framework, or it may add to our insight without necessarily awakening our emotions; the mind again may become conceited and unduly self-conscious as it works upon the records, until their intrinsic force and meaning cease to be felt. Yet these are either incidental defects, for which the historical method itself is not responsible, or temporary pains of growth. Here, as in other departments of inquiry into literary classics, the ultimate end is enjoyment and appreciation. This is what justifies any critical training. It does not indeed imply, nor does it invariably accompany, broad and sound knowledge. Any one knows how in studying a classic like Homer or Dante we may allow the technique of the critical method to prevent us from getting through to the force and fire of the original, which the untrained will often feel through the mere medium of a translation. It is a pity and a loss, ten times so in the study of the New Testament. Let this then be my last word about the historical method which would

set our feet upon the road to the New Testament: in moving towards this great literature we are not fully enlightened if we fail to be moved by it as we approach it.

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